AT THE SOUTH GATE

GRACE S. RICHMOND

Isadora Hunt O'Brien

AT THE SOUTH GATE

Books by Grace S. Richmond

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AT THE SOUTH GATE
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THE ENLISTING WIFE

AT THE SOUTH GATE

GRACE S. RICHMOND

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I

FIRE in the night!

Michael Paige, his brief case under his arm, getting off the late local out from Boston, saw the red glow in what looked like the near distance. It was precisely in the direction of the small brown house on the farther side of the village in which he and his wife, Ann, had lived since their marriage, six years ago.

Of course it couldn't be their house which was burning; it couldn't be. Fires were deceiving—they were always farther away than they looked to be. Nevertheless Michael, tall and slim, agile as well, in spite of the hours he spent every day over his typewriter in his tiny study in the brown house, quickened his steps. As he turned a curve in the street which led from that point straight toward his home, he broke into a run. If it wasn't the brown house it was mighty near by it that the mingled smoke and flames were pouring their fearsome, fluctuating column into the April sky. Now he could hear the roar and

crackle, and see the crowd gathered. It was—no, it wasn't—yes, it *must* be, the little brown cottage, tinder-like with age, with only one steep stairway leading down from the room where he and Ann slept. . . . Ann! . . . Oh, for wings on his feet! It was such a long street; it seemed to take him forever to make the distance. And not a motor passing which he could hail. They were all at the fire!

As he came near enough to see it the roof crashed in. That ended it, of course, though now he could discover a stream of water—a too puny stream—doing its best to do what couldn't be done. The house was gone. . . . Ann!

Then he saw her. She had been watching for him, knowing it must be time for him to come. She ran out of the crowd and toward him, and with a low groan of relief he caught her into his arms for one instant of thanksgiving that whatever he had lost it had not been Ann.

"Mikey! Don't let it *get* you! I'm safe, and all your books and manuscripts are too. It's not so terrible, really it isn't."

That was Ann all over. Ann was a sport, always. It was plain enough that she had made a quick escape; her thick chestnut hair was tumbling over her shoulders; she was wearing a blue bathrobe under her coat, and her feet, though slippered, were stockingless. In spite of all his

excitement and chagrin, Michael had the hurried thought that Ann had never been prettier or more desirable than at that moment. Good God—if he had lost her, Ann, in all her valiant sweetness and companionableness! Nothing else mattered.

An hour later, after the confusion was somewhat past, and most of the villagers had gone home, leaving the Paiges' next door neighbours to take them in for the rest of the night, Michael realized that there was something to matter besides the loss of a roof over their heads. The fire insurance on the brown cottage had lapsed exactly three days before. He had been too busy to renew it. He had meant to see to it that very day, in Boston, but the long talk he had had with the publishers of his first and only book had put it completely out of his mind. And he had only just made, within the month, the last payment on the house which he had bought when he was married. Also—he had about as little money in the bank as he had ever had in his married life, on account of that last payment over which he and Ann had rejoiced like a pair of children. So now—what to do?

II

THE immediate problem was finally solved by a letter from Charlton Braithwaite, of Braithwaite Court. It was not only a kind letter, it was a surprisingly understanding one.

"DEAR PAIGE:

"Just heard of your hard luck. We only came up last night. It must be the devil to be burned out like that. Of course it will take time to replace things, and to build a home. Meanwhile, why won't you and Mrs. Paige come and live in an empty house on our place, down by the South gate? No, it isn't a lodge. Was used for that once, but that was before we changed the entrance. Now it's standing idle. The house is furnished after a fashion. Our architect lived in it off and on while the big house was building, and Beatrice had some stuff put there she was discarding for the new place. As a sort of temporary quarters, while you make plans, it mightn't be so bad. Anyhow, you could get on with the book I suppose you're writing this summer, since a little thing like being burned out

would never slow down an actively visionary brain like yours.

"Let me know when you want it, and I'll have it swept out for you. Beatrice will be glad to supply you with linen and so on till you can get together the new outfit. To tell the truth, old man, I'm hoping desperately you'll accept this offer, if only for six months. I can't tell you how I should enjoy strolling down when our house is full of week-end guests, and smoking a pipe with you on that funny old porch. What do you say? Can you refuse me your hospitality?

"My best to Mrs. Paige.

"As ever, I'm faithfully yours,

"CHARLTON BRAITHWAITE."

When Michael Paige read this letter to Ann, —he had smoked his pipe over it for half an hour before he did so—she stopped short in her work of hastily making herself a dress as a beginning to replacing the burned wardrobe. The Paiges were quartered temporarily at the Black Lion Inn. The entire village had offered their spare rooms, but Michael and Ann had decided to be by themselves while they collected their scattered wits. It is rather disintegrating to be burned out of a comfortable if modest home in the twinkling of an eye.

"That certainly is a friendly letter," Ann said.

"I shouldn't have expected it of Charlton Braithwaite. But—I don't know——"

Michael confessed he didn't know either. They fell to discussing it. Part of the time Ann was at the sewing machine—lent her by the proprietor's wife. Bits of sentences reached Michael through the whirring:

"Beatty Braithwaite wouldn't really like it . . . At school she was always . . . The girls detested that arrogant . . . She had it even then . . . Can't be very different now . . . Charlton's plan . . . She had to agree . . . May not even know about it . . . I shouldn't use her sheets . . . Easily get a few common . . . It *is* a nice little old house . . ."

And so on. Presently Ann put away her work. It was dusk, and there was no drop light in the inn room by which she could sew.

"Let's take a walk and go by the place," she proposed.

Michael was willing. They had walked by the large, brick-walled estate a thousand times, but not critically, as prospective tenants of a small corner of it. It was about two miles from the centre of the Massachusetts village, on an elm-shaded, winding road that led past many other great country places. They would have to pass the ruins of their old home, for the first time since the ashes had stopped smouldering, but

there was no use minding that. It hadn't been a particularly attractive home of itself, but they had trained vines over its shabbiness, and had grown fond of it. It had sheltered some treasures, and there were memories tied up with it. Little Dick had gone from there—the only child the pair had had in the six years of their married life.

They paced along the road, hatless. It was a mild April evening—Ann didn't own a hat now, anyhow. The dress she was wearing was a borrowed one. Her burnished chestnut hair shone under the village arc lights; her head came just above Michael's angular shoulder. He was thin as a lath, with a gaunt, dark, good-looking face, and lips clamped tight on his pipe stem. Beside him Ann blossomed like a vigorous and vivid flower.

As they approached the low irregular outlines of what had been the walls of the small brown house, Michael felt Ann's hand tighten on his arm. They went by in silence. If they had been able to salvage a little more—if Ann could have had certain things which had been stored in the tiny attic . . . But, alone in the house when she wakened with the strong smell of smoke in her nostrils, she had had but one first thought, and there had been no time for second thoughts. More than once in the past Michael

had said to her: "If the house ever gets afire, Ann, save my stuff in the desk and the chest. It might mean a year's work to replace whatever I was working on—not to mention discarded manuscripts with possibilities. As for the books —they're our most valuable——"

"Of course!" She had always interrupted him at this point. "Your manuscripts and the books —of course they are. I'll get them out if everything else goes."

Her prophetic promise had been almost exactly fulfilled. The house had been all ablaze when she jumped out of bed, at midnight, with a hot partition next her burning her hand as she touched it. She had rushed to the telephone, roused a sleepy operator and sent in the alarm. Then she had made her way into the study, already reeking with smoke, had snatched an old steamer rug off the couch and tumbled the contents of the drawers and chest into it. She had thrown this out of the window, and had fired pile after pile of books out after it. Hearing of this afterward, Michael's breath had stopped, for the village fire chief had told him graphically that when he reached the spot the study windows, above the front porch, had shown enough firelight to make Ann's figure stand out against it, as she worked frantically at her task

of pitching their "most valuable" assets out to the lawn below. The chief's first move had been to dash up the little stairway, thick with smoke, and into the room.

" 'Mis' Paige,' I says to her, 'you ain't goin' to stay here another minute. Come along.' She looked at me cool as a cucumber. 'All right,' says she. 'I've got everything valuable out except this chest. I'd like to save that. If you'll help me——' I picked her up and took her downstairs under my arm—and high time. I never see a house go so quick in all my experience with fires."

Safely out of the house Ann had seen to the picking up of the books and the contents of the rugs. They had been carried by a neighbour to a near-by cellar, and there piled, helter-skelter. From this place Michael had rescued them, much the worse for the hard fall from the windows—the manuscripts in confusion, the books with occasional broken backs and bent corners, but all still "valuable" beyond comparison.

"I was terribly sorry to throw them, Mikey," Ann had apologized. "But it was the only way. And, anyhow, with everything else gone——"

"They're worth more than all the rest put together, to me," he assured her. "Except you. I can only keep on thanking God you——"

"Oh, I shouldn't have burned myself up saving the books," she said lightly. "It wouldn't have been as much of a jump for me from that window as it was for the books."

III

SO now the Paiges walked past the ruins in silence, and on along the road in the soft April night. Ann wasn't shedding even a tear or two as they went. She wasn't that sort. At thirty-three she was young and strong of body and healthy of mind. The house had burned down, and with it every keepsake she had in the world, but she was over the worst of the inevitable reaction, and already she was busy with plans and hopes. The one thing important to her was that Michael's work shouldn't be long interrupted.

The truth was, as Michael had realized at once, that they had hardly any funds in hand, and wouldn't have till he had marketed his new book. It was a long time since he had had much of any royalties from his first book, though it had been a fair success. Articles and reviews had brought in enough to live on, but the fire had placed the Paiges in a difficult position. There were few houses to rent in the old New England town, and they couldn't now afford even the least attractive of these.

Charlton Braithwaite's letter certainly had given a new turn to the situation. On the face of it, it solved all the difficulties at a stroke. There seemed to be no real reason why the Paiges shouldn't accept so kind an offer from an old college classmate who could afford to give them the house, if he were so inclined,—and if they would take it—as of course they wouldn't. The Braithwaites were among the richest people in the county. Charlton hadn't been a special friend, but Michael had tutored "Charl" time and again at crises, and had pulled him through examinations that would otherwise have floored him. He had been a florid chap even then, a lavish spender, and a favourite with a certain carefree set. Now—well—he was Charlton Braithwaite of Braithwaite Court.

That wasn't so bad, Ann thought, that he should be Charlton Braithwaite. He really couldn't help that. The trouble was that his wife was Beatrice Braithwaite—who had been Beatrice Lawton. Ann had frankly detested her at school, and she knew Beatrice had warmly returned the feeling.

"Why shouldn't she?" Ann argued. "There she was, a little nabob. I mean she was arrogant—often insufferable. It wasn't because she had so much money. There were plenty of other rich girls at school—perfect dears, my best

friends. But Beatty Lawton and I simply couldn't get on."

"I can guess another reason," Michael suggested. He well remembered the popularity of Ann Gaysworthy. One could hardly get a look-in on her at Proms. An arrogant nabob would be sure to be jealous of a popular girl without much money to spend.

"There were lots of other reasons—no matter. But the recollection of them makes me wonder."

"The thought of Charl makes me wonder, too," Michael admitted. "When he used to come for his coaching hour, decidedly the worse for wear, smoking his monogrammed smokes, I used to pull harder on my old pipe that cost a dollar, and get even by pointing out to him that if he put down in his paper that the Congress of Vienna was assembled in 1714, he'd be flunked. That was a pretty decent letter, though, Ann.—Here we are. Well——"

It was an interesting-looking house, no doubt of that. They strolled slowly in at the abandoned South gate—the elaborate new stone entrance known as the North gate was farther down the road—and wandered about the house in the April dusk. It had been built long before the great mansion had been reared back among the trees, at the end of a winding avenue. In its

first days, the small old red brick house had been the home of a great-grandfather Braithwaite. Then, when the first ambitious dwelling had been built, the old house had become a lodge. When the big house had been torn down to make way for the now existing enormous gray stone structure with its tall columns, the South gateway and the old homestead had together been abandoned.

"Yes, it's a fascinating little old house," Ann said, "and not so small, either. Of course, if it's furnished, it would be perfectly comfortable, whether or not we liked Beatty Lawton's discards."

"They may be much more likable than her new and gorgeous furnishings," Michael suggested.

"There's a great square chimney in the middle." Ann was walking backward to peer up at it in the gathering darkness. "That must mean fireplaces. If it does——"

"If it does——" Michael repeated. "Well, suppose we come over and look at it in the morning and see how we like it."

"If we can make up our minds to live at our old school acquaintances' South gateway—— Oh, I wish we could offer them rent for it!"

"We can't, at present. Either we take it or leave it—as a gift."

"Yes—I suppose so. Mikey—I keep thinking about that bank balance!"

"So do I. I don't think of anything else."

"I don't suppose Beatty Lawton"—Ann couldn't get over referring to Mrs. Braithwaite as she had known her, for since her marriage the two had seldom met—"will come down here more than once. I can bear that once. I don't imagine her husband will come more than once either—that about smoking on our porch was just a way of being nice to you. The guests will go in and out the other way. The tennis courts and the bathing pool and the rose gardens and all the other things aren't anywhere near here. And the shrubbery shelters us so from the road, we shan't seem near it at all. Honestly—how do you feel about it?"

"Exactly as you do, I fancy. That it's a windfall and we should pick it up. Why should we feel a false pride, Ann? The arrangement is only temporary. We can keep on looking around and be away from here in two months, if we wish—and find anything we can swing. Meanwhile, I confess, the more I look at this house the more I think I could do some good work in it."

"That settles it," Ann decided. "If you can work here we *ought* to take it. We——" She stopped short. "That's the Braithwaite car turning in," she said under her breath. She confessed

afterward that at the moment she was fairly praying that Beatty wasn't in the car.

She wasn't. It was Charlton Braithwaite himself, having been met at the late train up from New York. The South gate was nearer the village than the North one, and though the mistress of the Court always insisted on being driven in properly between the big North gateposts with their lighted iron lanterns, the master, when alone, preferred this shorter route.

Charlton got out of the car and came forward. Michael advanced to meet him, and Ann slowly followed. Charlton weighed more than he should, these days, but his movements were active. He was always faultlessly dressed. In the light from the big car he looked like some stout prince descending to meet one of his subjects. To do Charlton justice, however, there was no swagger about him; merely the assurance which goes with wealth and conscious power. Michael was sure that even as he came to meet them he was telling himself to take care to say the right thing to old Michael Paige, because he was always a reserved sort of chap, and touchy inside, whether he showed it or not.

"How are you, Paige?" he said, cordially, and his hand grasped Michael's warmly. "How do you do, Mrs. Paige?" He bowed over Ann's hand which she had extended with a certain

gracious air she had at command. Of course after that first smothered exclamation Ann rose to the occasion. There was no look of the would-be runaway about her even though the situation seemed an awkward one.

"How do you do, Mr. Braithwaite?" she answered, and her voice was delightful. Ann's voice was one of her best points—Michael noticed it particularly at the moment. "You see we couldn't resist your offer, or wait to look again at the lovely old house. It was mighty kind of you to suggest our having it for the summer."

"Then you're going to take it. I certainly am glad to hear that." Charlton's tone was hearty —not too hearty, either. Michael had to give him credit for avoiding the over-beneficent manner of the landowner among his peasantry. "I wish the place were in better shape, but if you can give me a couple of days I'll have it thoroughly aired to get the mustiness out of it. Fortunately it's been used from time to time, so I think nothing's mouldy. I have a real affection for it, you see, as my great-grandfather's early home."

"That's pleasant to remember." Ann was taking the burden of the conversation, as she usually did. Michael was more or less reticent—except with her. He was feeling a certain constraint just now in spite of his conviction that

they would be fools to refuse this chance. "It surely looks like a real home," Ann went on, "and we're feeling so homeless just now it invites us."

"You must be feeling that way, Mrs. Paige. I've always thought I'd sit down and cry like a baby if I ever lost certain old junk of mine that nobody else would care a hang for. Wasn't anything saved at all?"

"The most important things—Michael's manuscripts and his books. We were very lucky to get those out."

"That *was* luck! Especially for him, if he's as I remember him. I suppose he'd rather lose everything else he had than those."

"It was more than luck, it was daring," Michael interpolated. "My wife saved them at the risk of her life."

"Nonsense, Michael! I really had the thrill of my life doing it."

"My word!" Braithwaite turned and stared at the house, as if he expected to see through its walls. "I don't know whether there's a bookcase in the house. The truth is, I don't think anybody with literary tastes ever lived in it. Well, never mind—we'll produce some bookcases somehow."

"I beg you won't." Ann pounced upon him, determination in her low tone. "We're going to

have some plain cases made, and I shall paint them. I know exactly what to do. Please don't send anything."

"But I want to—if I know what you'd like. The house is mostly furnished with old stuff—Beatty hates it, but I rather like it. We'd go in now and look the place over, but the lighting system's turned off. I'll get it turned on tomorrow. By the way, let me take you back to the Black Lion—that's where you're staying, isn't it?"

"Yes, thank you—but we want the walk, you know. We always do several miles a day, for the good of our souls. And we love this road."

"It's more than for the good of your souls, I suspect," Charlton answered Ann. Michael could see him noting her beautifully proportioned, youthful figure. He had met Ann two or three times before now. Not an ounce too much did Ann Paige carry—she simply wouldn't permit it to happen. As for Michael, tall as he was he didn't much outweigh his wife. But Charlton and Beatrice Braithwaite were both many pounds too heavy. Nobody ever saw either of them on foot, Ann reflected, if the distance to be covered were more than a few rods.

Charlton got into his car, and Michael and Ann walked away out of the South gate. The thing was done now, anyhow. They were com-

mitted to living for a time in the former lodge of the owner of this great estate. The redeeming feature of the situation, Michael agreed with Ann, was that the small ivy-covered brick house, so close to the gateway in the high wall which enclosed the entire place, had also been the former home of old Eliphalet Braithwaite, a bigger and a better man, according to his place in our American histories, than his great-grandson. Why should they not want to live between the walls which had once sheltered General Braithwaite, whose portrait, they were to find, hung dimly above the fireplace, beneath the crossed swords he once had carried?

IV

"THEY'VE decided to accept, Beatty."

"Who've decided to accept—what?"

Charlton Braithwaite regarded his wife across her breakfast tray, which spanned her half reclining figure propped against several pillows of tumbled linen and lace. She looked as if she liked neither her breakfast nor anything else in the world. Even the lace-and-ribbon bandeau which subdued her as yet undressed blonde hair was slightly awry—like her mouth. Even so, she was not an altogether unattractive young woman.

"Why—the Paiges—our offer to take the old lodge, till they can find something permanent."

Beatty Braithwaite's frown, between her lowering brows, became deeper. Her voice was very petulant.

"Oh. Of course they would. You were sure they wouldn't. I don't know why they should be proud. Ann Gaysworthy wasn't anybody, and she didn't marry anybody."

"Michael Paige is somebody. He's done something—in his literary world. Undoubtedly he'll

do more. And Mrs. Paige is a particularly charming woman. I'm glad they're coming."

"Oh, yes, of course. Anything for a diversion —with you. Well—when are these people coming? I *knew* they'd accept. I *told* you they would."

"Why did we offer them the house if we didn't want them to accept?"

"Oh, *you* did it—heaven knows I opposed the silly idea. Just because he happened to be in Harvard when you were, and Ann Gaysworthy went to school with me, I have to put myself out to look after them."

"Beatty, you're absolutely unreasonable about this. It's a very simple matter to have that house put in shape. No houses in the village to be had —they've got to live somewhere till they can find something. Now, I want you to do the decent thing and send Ann Paige a note telling her —what you ought to tell her."

"That I'm overwhelmed with joy she's coming to live at my door, I suppose." Beatty Braithwaite's laugh was mirthless. "There's one thing I want you to understand though, Charl. I will *not* make neighbours of them, village fashion—as they'll of course expect. You've forced them on me so far, but I won't have them here. They'd fit in nicely, wouldn't they, with

the sort of people we entertain! I can see them —like a couple of brown hens in a flock of—of pheasants. No—I *won't!*"

Charlton Braithwaite flushed angrily. "There's no reason to think they'd care to get into your covey of pheasants," he retorted. "All I'm asking is that you'll treat them civilly, not as if they were the dust of the earth. They're very interesting people, I tell you. It might easily be that they'd condescend to us, instead of the other way around. Literary people——"

"Literary people are the dullest, drabbest, fustiest people there are," replied his wife promptly. "Ann Gaysworthy always looked like a dust heap at school—never wore anything but browns and dingy dark blues. Her hats were unspeakable—they never had a particle of style."

"I've no doubt of it—from your point of view." Charlton got up and walked away to the window. "Nevertheless, I expect you to be ordinarily polite. Promise me you'll write that note this morning."

"To-morrow'll do. I've got any amount of things to see to to-day."

"Shall I send Miss Heath to you now?"

"You needn't trouble yourself—though I presume you'd enjoy doing it. She's due in my room at twelve, as you very well know."

"Promise me you'll write the note this morning."

"Oh, heavens—anything to stop your heckling. I'll dictate one—I won't write it myself. Ann Gaysworthy won't know the difference."

He had to be content with that. He knew the note would come out the better for having gone through the accomplished hands of the social secretary who, though only recently come, was now his wife's main reliance. He came back to the bedside, stooped and placed a light kiss on Beatty's cheek—which she received with an indifference to match his who gave it—and left the room.

Five minutes later the secretary rapped, was admitted, and came to stand at the foot of Mrs. Braithwaite's bed. A greater contrast between two young women could hardly have been imagined.

Beatrice Braithwaite, plump of body, slightly blowsy of face, very blonde hair showing beneath the French bandeau with its rose ribbons, looked somewhat like a cross child, though her years were very evidently more than those of her secretary. Julia Heath's silky-smooth black hair lay in a definite line above her white forehead and gray-blue, black-lashed eyes; her clear, slightly dusky skin held the mere sugges-

tion of a flush, as if she might recently have come in from a brisk walk. She was slim, not very tall, and dressed with a dark simplicity of finish, upon which her employer instantly commented, barely returning Miss Heath's low "Good-morning, Mrs. Braithwaite."

"Do you ever have a hair out of place, my dear?"

Her secretary smiled. "I try not to have. It would annoy you if I did, wouldn't it?"

"You know you could be perfectly in order without that look of having been chiselled into shape—so you couldn't get out of it, even in a high gale. I don't mean to say I don't envy you—I do." The tone was fretful, like the face. "Well—" she sighed heavily—"we may as well get at business. I suppose you have everything in order. I never can remember when I wake up what I have on for the day."

From the secretary's notebook Mrs. Braithwaite was informed. She was due at a luncheon at a country house two miles away. There was an afternoon bridge club, at the home of a neighbour—the sort of neighbour whose great Georgian mansion, like Braithwaite Court itself, was never seen from the high road. That evening the Braithwaites were entertaining at dinner, a small affair—twelve. Next morning

nine or ten house guests were to arrive for the week-end, and there would be gayer affairs on foot than dinners.

"There are several letters—personal." Julia Heath laid them, unopened, on the bed cover, close to the languid, white hand resting there. "A number of invitations—I'll take your replies, if you wish, and get them off. Then, if there's anything else you want to dictate——"

"There is—but we'll do everything else first. Read me the invitations. I hope there's something worth having. I need to be amused, and everything's dull as ditchwater. Well—go on."

It took nearly an hour to get through the routine, interrupted as it was by Beatty's capricious comments. Finally, the moment arrived when she could find nothing more to delay the promised note to Ann Paige. She punched a small lace-covered pillow into place under her neck, sighed again, complaining that it made her head ache to attend to all her own affairs and her husband's too, and began to dictate:

"My dear Ann." Then she paused, undecided. "Oh, well," she said, "begin again. I suppose I must. *Dearest Ann."*

The secretary paused, with held pencil: "Do you wish me to write this as if it were in your own hand?"

"Of course I do. She won't know the differ-

ence—she hasn't seen my handwriting in years. Make it tall and slanting—you know how I write. And sign it yourself—my name, of course. I don't want to see the thing again, once it's off my mind."

Miss Heath bent her head over her paper. "Very well."

"*Dearest Ann,* then.—Oh, blazes!—Of course, that's not in the note—I don't know *what* to say.—Well—" she made a wry face—"*I am so pleased that you will live in our old lodge*—no, wait—*I mean in our South gate house until you can make better plans.*"

The note went on haltingly, but it was completed at last, and the dictator lay back with a sigh of relief. "Find out when they're arriving—the people my husband has asked to live in the old lodge for the summer. And send this down by Lena."

The secretary rose, notebook in hand, with the little packet of invitations, to which Mrs. Braithwaite had indicated the replies. "I'll go and attend to these at once," she said, and stood for a minute looking down at the figure in the bed, as if there were something she wanted to say.

"Oh, you may go." Beatty Braithwaite waved her hand with a gesture of dismissal. "I can't stand seeing anybody who looks so like an un-

smutched lily as you do. I feel like a big red rose that somebody's worn to a dance, beside you. I'm badly wilted, with the petals torn. How do you do it?"

"Plenty of sleep, long walks, and—no excitement, I suppose, Mrs. Braithwaite," her secretary replied, with an amused smile.

"No excitement! How do you live without it?"

"I'm used to that."

"If you stay here, you'll have to have some. I shall wish you present when I have a crowd, and you'll have to fill in sometimes at dinner when a guest fails. I suppose you dance—all girls do—and have evening things."

"I have a few simple things."

"Very well. Now run along. I want to get the thought of business out of my head."

Miss Heath withdrew. For the following hour she attended scrupulously to her duties. Then, the letters and notes dispatched, she addressed herself to something personally more interesting. In the next mail there went out a long letter to her brother, Dale Heath, in Montana.

V

"DEAREST DALE:

I've been here four days now, and am beginning to feel a bit wonted—if not at home. I could never be that here. It's a great ostentatious house, and the people in it—all but one—fit the place. They're not the real thing, Dale—you'll be sorry about that. I think now I might have known it from the correspondence; perhaps I did feel it, rather; but I wouldn't admit it, I was so eager for my first job. The one exception is a perfectly delightful old man—Mr. Scarborough Braithwaite—who is here on a visit; an uncle of Mr. Charlton Braithwaite, my employer's husband. Uncle Scar—as they call him—really quite redeems the situation.

"As for the others: The master of the house is one of those pink and puffy youngish men, who look as if they'd been fed on bonbons from their cradles. Pleasant mannered enough, but doesn't give the impression of having really useful brains of his own. *He* certainly didn't make the money he lives on. He's always scrupulously dressed, as such men are. His wife, whose secretary I am, is also pink and puffy though still

rather pretty; but instead of suggesting bonbons she makes me think of cream and vinegar mixed, the result a sort of curdle. She's socially very ambitious; dictatorial, and rather ill-tempered, besides being decidedly nervous. Her too-rapidly accumulating flesh annoys her—she can't be more than twenty-nine or thirty—and her very poor complexion distresses her, though her clever French maid does wonders with it—when the light isn't too strong. She's crazy for excitement and knows only one way of getting it—inviting people of her own sort and entertaining them lavishly with every wild novelty she can hear of. Disappointed with her failure to be happily stimulated, she becomes fretful, and takes it out on me next morning. I've gathered that she wishes I were uglier! What can I do about it, Dale? I've never fancied myself a beauty, but the observations she makes upon my appearance would lead me to think her envious. Poor girl—I really pity her.

"There's a Mrs. Montague in the house—a sort of supporting older friend of Mrs. Braithwaite, who does the honours for her when requested, or when things grow dull. One of those well-groomed, expensively dressed, middle-aged women who have all social codes at their fingers' ends. She knows nothing whatever, that I can

discover, beyond her little artificial world. As for the staff of servants—they seem mostly the sort of servants such people surround themselves with, snobs in their own right. All but two—one maid and one chauffeur—both quite genuine and attractive—Lena and William. When I think of our beloved old Virginia home, with dear black 'Liza and 'Rastus, I admit I grow homesick. This great showy house can't compare for a moment with our shabby old place—any more than an upstart in checked tweeds with a pocket full of money can compare with a little old gentlewoman in worn-out black silk. There are no dim family portraits on the walls of this drawing room, only an immense canvas done by a modern painter, of Mrs. Braithwaite in green silk and ropes of pearls, with a too sweet smile on her face, and her hands placed in an attitude she never could have achieved by herself! How character—or lack of it—does come out in a portrait! That painter *knew*—and didn't conceal.

"Dale, am I a snob myself for feeling superior to these people? But I shouldn't, you know, no matter how rich they were, if they were of a different type—'the real thing'—that phrase which seems to describe what I love. And it's what you are, though you had to leave ease in

Virginia to toil in Montana—or *because* you did, you trump!

"Write often—Dale dear—there are no letters like yours.

"JULIA."

VI

AT the Black Lion Inn Ann was sewing away at top speed, determined to reclothe herself—inexpensively but neatly—as rapidly as possible, when the expressman brought in a package. A note lay upon the sheet of white tissue paper that covered the contents. It was from a former school friend. Ann read it aloud to Michael, who reluctantly put down his notebook to listen.

"Ann darling," the note began, "I've read all about it in the papers—how your distinguished husband lost all his manuscripts and books in the fire which burned you out—and how nothing at all was saved. What a terrible loss, and how will he ever replace them? But I'm so thankful to think that it's an easier matter for you to get new clothes—only it's such a frightful bother. And, dear Ann, isn't it the luckiest thing? At school you and I were always exactly of a size, only you're just a wee bit taller than I, and I always did go in for extremes more than you, and I fortunately love deep hems, so you'll find it very simple to let them down an inch or two. And Geoff and I are just sailing for

France, and I've been planning to get everything absolutely new there, for these things don't suit me a bit. I was going to give them to the heathen, or something—the missionaries, anyway—and I don't think missionaries are just my style——"

Here Ann burst into peals of laughter. "Do you remember Madeline Warren who married Geoffrey Dupont? No, I don't think missionaries *are* just her style. A missionary suddenly bedecked in Maddy Dupont's things would forget her mission."

The letter concluded with increasingly incoherent directions to Ann as to how to alter certain frivolous effects which might not altogether please her presumably more restrained tastes. It then referred again to the missionaries, evidently with the intention of removing from Ann's conscience any possible doubt as to the righteousness of depriving them of silks and chiffons. The note then concluded with the statement that by the time Ann should receive it, she, Madeline Dupont, would be beyond the three-mile limit. The Dupont house would be closed, she said—closed tight. So, with a world of love for her dear old Ann, and her very best also to that clever husband whom she hoped sometime to meet—and Geoff would love to meet him, too, she added (evidently as an after-

thought, for the sentiment was crowded in at the end of the line)—she was always Ann's devoted Maddy.

Ann laid down the note and looked at Michael. Her adorable brown eyes were not exactly misty, but he could see that she was greatly touched.

"Isn't that a dear letter?" she demanded.

"It is not constructed on the most approved lines of lucidly clear English," he said with a grin, "but I shall have to admit its meaning gets over. She does seem rather a dear."

Ann now snatched off the tissue paper. Michael heard a smothered breath. Mrs. Geoffrey Dupont, lifting her sympathetic gaze from the paragraph that told of the destruction of Mrs. Michael Paige's home, including all the papers and books of her friend's distinguished husband, must have gone straight to her wardrobe and taken down from their silk-padded hangers half the contents thereof. With a lavish hand she had laid them across the arm of her maid, bidding her pack and send them.

When Ann had emptied the box, she sat back on her heels. "Michael Paige," she said solemnly, "never in my life have I expected to own such clothes. Even from Maddy Dupont, who's richer than Crœsus, it doesn't seem as if I ought to accept them. But I know she would

be hurt beyond words if I should send the boxes back. And she really does love me. Besides——"

"Besides, she's well out at sea by now," Michael repeated from memory, "and by the time she returned they would be out of style."

Ann pressed his arm. "You do understand, old dear," she murmured. "Oh, just look at them, Mikey!"

She held up one after another of the—to her husband's eye—formless garments. Michael could get very little idea of what the things would look like when donned properly, but Ann needed no assurance on this point.

"She's really made a marvellous selection," she pointed out. "There are a lot of sports things—she knew I could always use those. She's put in two perfectly darling afternoon frocks, and an evening dress——Oh—well, *look* at it!"

Ann snatched up a wisp of coral and silver with a hint of green about it, that looked more or less adequate to cover a child of three.

"Of course, I shall never wear it," Ann assured her husband, noting his dubious look.

"You might wear it just to entertain me," he suggested. "Whether I should care to have anyone else present——"

"I meant the occasion would never come,"

Ann explained, with a look intended to wither. "Of course I should wear it—why, she's even remembered to put in the silver band for the hair that goes with it. Aren't all these other things delicious? Just my colours, too—greens and hennas and oranges with rose casts. And some stunning white things. *And* the hats!"

Utterance seemed to fail her, as before, in the contemplation of the hats. She put on one of them to show him—a flopping thing, from under whose brim she looked out at him in a way that he recognized as invariably his undoing if he permitted it to continue. Even after seven years' acquaintance, it had been quite impossible for Michael to get over liking to look at Ann in whatever she chose to wear. When she put on so artful an aid to persuasion as a hat like that, his only safety was to turn his back. He now turned it.

Ann misunderstood. She cast aside the hat and caught his arm again.

"I'm afraid you mind my having them, Michael," she said, soberly. "I'll send them straight back."

"You'll do nothing of the sort. They're a godsend," he replied firmly. "Of course, I wish I could give them to you myself, but since I can't I'll cheerfully permit Mrs. Geoffrey Dupont

to bestow them upon you—particularly since she says they didn't prove becoming to her."

"Of course," Ann admitted, "that was one of Maddy's nice lies. But it is perfectly true that she'll get a gorgeous new lot of things in Paris and would have given every one of these to her maid afterward. And I know she'd be frightfully offended if I wouldn't keep them."

"Keep them—with my blessing," her husband responded.

"I'm afraid," admitted Ann Paige, her eyes again upon the wisp of coral and silver, "I'd be weak enough, and mean enough, to keep them, even without it."

VII

THE house at the South gate being ready, the Paiges "moved." Not that there was much to move. Except for the books and the package of manuscript, they had almost literally nothing in the world. This gave them a queer feeling, certainly, from which it was a little difficult to recover. But they were glad to get away from the inn. The obstruction to the author's work caused by the fire hadn't yet levelled itself. He had been able to do very little at the inn. He realized that he was a person of encrusted habit. The loss of the old desk where he had worked for ten years, the change in the view from the window beside it, the noises and bustle about the inn—everything seemed to throw sand into the workings of his mental machinery.

When they were driven in at the South gate they saw that the house door was open. As they got out, a pretty maid in black and white came out upon the porch. She handed Ann a big envelope, addressed in a dashing hand. Ann afterward showed Michael this note, which ran as follows:—

"DEAREST ANN:

"I am so pleased that you will live in our South gate house until you can make better plans. I hope you will be comfortable, but am afraid the old house needs much more done to it than Charlton could accomplish in this short time. If you are not bringing a maid, please keep Lena for the day to help you get your things in order. I haven't heard how much you saved from the fire, or should have supplied the deficiencies myself. You will excuse this hasty note, won't you? I have a frightful headache, and my head is throbbing so I can hardly see. I don't dare take enough tablets to stop it, they make my heart act so badly, and with important people coming for the week-end I must keep about. I suppose you will be tired to-day with getting the house settled and would prefer to rest. But I shall see you soon, and meanwhile I am,

"Affectionately yours,
"BEATRICE."

Having read the note, Ann made a little speech to the maid. "Please tell Mrs. Braithwaite everything is very nice, and we appreciate her thoughtfulness. Say that we'll not need anything more, and thank her for me. I hope her

headache will be better very soon. Good-bye, Lena—and thank you for yourself."

This was accompanied by a charming smile, and Michael could see that Lena was reluctant to go.

"I'm sorry I can't do anything more for you, Mrs. Paige," she said politely, and Michael and Ann both found themselves liking Lena. But Michael understood Ann's wish not to accept even a day's service from the servants of their benefactors, since the Paiges were already so deeply in the Braithwaites' debt. So Lena departed, and Michael and Ann entered their new temporary home together.

"The house is a perfectly terrible jumble," Ann declared, leading her husband along the central hall. She had rushed everywhere while he was surveying one room. "But it certainly has possibilities when we get sorted out and changed around. There's every kind of furniture in it—evidently they simply dumped everything they didn't want at the big house. But the whole place has been thoroughly cleaned. And, oh, your friend Charlton has put in a bathroom."

"Mighty decent of him, I should say," Michael commented, "and quick work. He must have influence with the plumbers. When we put in a bathroom it took two months—remember?"

"Come and look at everything," Ann urged.

"You didn't really expect to write today, did you, Mikey?"

"I harboured neither the wish nor the expectation," Michael assured her—and took off his coat.

Thus the day began. Before it was over every muscle in Michael's body was aching, but Ann showed no sign of weakening. Hour after hour they lifted and tugged and pulled. While they were in the midst of it, Charlton Braithwaite appeared. They were bumping downstairs at the moment, bringing an old desk that Ann had found in the attic to take the place of a preposterous gilt table and two gilt chairs. The author's hair was damply plastered to his forehead, and—as he afterward discovered—his face was grimy.

"Good lord!" Charlton exclaimed, coming promptly up the stairs to lend a hand. "Why didn't you have somebody help you with this? It's a shame to tire yourselves out the first day."

"We love it," Ann panted. "I hope you don't mind our changing things around a little, Mr. Braithwaite."

The phrase was hardly exact. If there was one article of furniture in the house that now stood where it had been when the pair came in, in the morning, it was only because they hadn't yet

got around to move it. It occurred to Michael, as he caught sight of Charlton's mildly astonished face, that perhaps they shouldn't have started in with a complete revolution on that first day, as if they really couldn't endure his house or anything in it overnight. The same idea, as she afterward admitted, flitted through Ann's mind, but she immediately suppressed it. She took Charlton to see Michael's study.

"By George, it's a pleasanter room than I realized," Charlton said, looking about him. Michael saw Ann reacting to this praise of her work, and liking Charlton better than she had done before. There wasn't much now in the room. Clear spaces were Michael's joy. So upon the bare old dark wood floor lay only one small rug for him to kick out of his way; and there were but two chairs, a spindle-legged table, and an old high-backed couch besides the desk and its armchair. Three dark-toned portraits on the wall gave character to the room.

"It looks to me like an exceedingly comfortable workshop," Michael said.

"Then reward me by promising to stay on as long as you can be contented," was Charlton's warm reply. "It's a satisfaction to me to have the old place used by friends of mine."

Ann looked after him as he returned to his car.

"He's really been very nice," she acknowledged.

"I told you he was a good sport," Michael reminded her. "Money hasn't made him arrogant, if it has spoiled his muscle and wind."

That evening, rereading Beatty's note, Ann admitted that it was kinder than she had expected. "But she doesn't want us," she insisted. "Probably her husband has made her play up."

"You women," Michael began, "always thinking you can read each other's minds——"

"But we can, you know," Ann said serenely. "I wonder," she went on reflectively, "who her 'important people' are. Really important, do you think, Michael? Or only the financially mighty of this world?"

"Those, of course; with a sprinkling of others more or less well known—for one reason or another. Charlton told me one owns the biggest private yacht afloat. There's a world-famed music-hall singer—English. A dancer—two divorcées—a popular novelist—and plenty of lively fashionables of the Braithwaite sort, I judge."

"It's going to be rather fun," Ann said, after pondering this information, "to be here for a little at their gate. At first I hated the idea, now I'm getting excited about it.—Mikey, did you

have enough to eat at that sketchy meal we had three hours ago?"

"I have known deeper satisfaction," Michael confessed. "But you couldn't get going the first day, with everything else to do. To-morrow we shall probably really begin to live."

"There is, in the pantry," she now told him, somewhat shamefacedly, "a hamper of food from the Big House that I didn't want to accept, but couldn't actually refuse. I'd thought I wouldn't use it, I'm that pernickety and ridiculous. But somehow—I'm so hungry, in spite of all that paper-bag stuff we ate."

Forgetting his lame muscles, Michael hurriedly rose from the settle. "Tell me where it is," he demanded. "At the moment I would eat it out of your friend Beatty's own bejewelled hand, if I couldn't get it any other way, after this day of slaving like a dog under your lash."

It was Ann's turn to laugh as she alertly followed Michael's tall figure hastening into the house. "Oh, Michael Paige," she harried him, "to what depths of cringing beggary have we come? I would eat it from the hand of the man who owns the biggest yacht in the world. But afterward—when your book comes out—I would send it to him—your book, signed by your own hand. And who is he that he should think the exchange uneven?"

VIII

IT WAS five days before the Paiges saw the mistress of Braithwaite Court. Though the great house with its imposing pillared front could not be seen from the South gate, it was, beyond the trees and shrubbery, not so far away but that strains of music or shouts of hilarity came floating down to Michael and Ann, late at night, almost as if they were next door.

In spite of this proximity, however, Mrs. Charlton Braithwaite made her first call by means of her own car. Instead of strolling down —as Michael had predicted she would, and as Ann had said positively she wouldn't—by way of the driveway, or by one of the exquisitely flower-bordered paths, or over the velvet lawn, she took her seat upon the cushions of the great grey car, and (presumably) said to William, "Go by the South gate, William. And stop. I have an errand there."

Michael admitted her. Ann was ironing on the back porch.

"Mr. Paige? How do you do?"

Michael bowed. "Please come in, Mrs. Braithwaite."

She held out her hand. "So delighted to have you here," she assured him in her peculiar, rather thick and decidedly indolent voice. She glanced about her as he ushered her through the hall and into the parlour. "How charmingly you have arranged everything," she commented. Michael was confident that she didn't think so. How could she? They were using the furnishings she had discarded.

The two held a brief and extremely formal conversation, then Michael went to summon Ann.

At the lunch table, an hour afterward, Ann told the tale. "It's over! Beatty Lawton and Ann Gaysworthy have met again, after six summers during which they've lived within a mile and a half of each other!"

"I've met Charl from time to time, you know," Michael reminded her. "At Community House and Library board meetings, and Class dinners, and such places. He's quite public-spirited. And he's always been very friendly."

Ann brushed this statement away. "Within a mile and a half of each other. And now we're living in their house. And Beatty Lawton is just the same old Beatty—only terribly heavier. She's keeping it under just as well as stays and

massages and baths and dieting can do it, but it makes her discontented. I can forgive her almost anything when I think that we're the same height and I weigh just a hundred and thirty-eight to her—well, it must be sixty or seventy."

This purely feminine point of view was bound to amuse Michael. "I must make a careful estimate of Charlton's weight," he murmured. "Well, did you enjoy the call?"

"Oh, enormously. It was so interesting to see Beatty trying to adapt herself. She really did pretty well. But I could see her making up her mind that I'd be socially impossible, because I shouldn't have the right clothes. So she's invited us to dinner, Wednesday night, 'just with the family.' I wanted to laugh like anything, it was so evident she was arranging it not to embarrass us—or herself—by bringing us into contact with people who would overwhelm us. Mikey, am I beneath contempt—because—thanks to Maddy Dupont—I'm looking forward to seeing Beatty's face when I come in, Wednesday evening? I *can* carry off a situation like that, you know, dear!"

"You can. The question is, can I carry it off to match you?"

"Oh, yes! With your long legs, and your dark, thin face, and your way of being silent till nobody expects anything of you and then coming

out with some brilliant, amusing speech that makes everybody look at you and gasp——"

"My dear Ann, you should be a writer of fiction. And what, may I inquire, have my long legs to do with the situation? Would short legs make me totally unacceptable? Napoleon——"

"And Beatty knows you're worth entertaining, because you're beginning to be known in a world she's ambitious to be familiar with. She's just afraid of me—expects me to come in white muslin and a blue sash and make mistakes with my forks and spoons."

"Ann." Michael said it severely. "What does it matter whether Mrs. Braithwaite approves of us and invites us next time with those she has avoided asking us with on Wednesday night? If she does, I shall call that a pretty small triumph!"

"It will be." Ann admitted it with becoming meekness. But the next instant she added: "If these people were like the Warders, Mikey, or the Constants; if they were *that* sort of rich—educated, and splendidly democratic and yet sensitive to the charms of birth and breeding—well—I shouldn't be tempted to this mean sort of plotting. I shouldn't need to be."

"But," he reminded her, "we've accepted the

Braithwaites' hospitality—we're living in their house."

Ann coloured. "You're absolutely right, my dear," she owned.

IX

ON Wednesday evening, when Ann appeared before Michael's eyes, turning about to let him view her, her lovely arms extended and her smiling, questioning look upon him, he had no words to express his amazement. He said to himself that he had never before fully understood the difference clothes do make. Never had Ann's apparel seemed to him to fall short of a desirable suitability to the hour. But now he gazed at her as if he never had seen her before. She was nothing short of enchanting to the eye and disconcerting to the judgment.

There was something about her attitude both triumphant and appealing.

"Shall you like taking me, Mikey?" she urged. "Because I like going with you, if you do. That's all I really care about, you know. And you look so very nice, and so truly distinguished, I shall be fearfully proud of you."

Michael took her outstretched hands in both his and looked searchingly—and rather wistfully—into her lifted eyes. "Yes, I shall rather like taking you," he said. "And sometime, Ann——"

Ann continued to read him. He supposed he was an open book to her. He wished she were that to him, but he despaired of it, as any mere man must.

"Sometime," she said gently, "your royalties are going to be so big you can give me things that will make Maddy Dupont's look bizarre. Meanwhile—let's be off."

They walked slowly up through the flower-bordered paths they hadn't yet followed to the end, and emerged at the side of the great house. They arrived at the front entrance and were shown in with ceremony. No host and hostess were to be found in the drawing room, but after a ten-minute wait, during which their spirits slowly congealed and Michael could see Ann becoming more and more furious, Charlton Braithwaite came hurrying in. As he rushed across the floor to his guests, he looked extremely flurried and unhappy, but he smiled widely.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said. "Beatty and I meant to meet you on the very doorstep. But one of the servants was taken violently ill, and we were all thrown into a commotion. Things look better now, I'm glad to say. Everybody'll be down very shortly. Do come out on the West porch—it's much more comfortable there than inside on such a night."

He led the way. Michael found himself won-

dering about that servant. Ann afterward declared that she hadn't the slightest notion that anything had happened except that Beatty had forgotten her invitation till she saw the guests approaching—certainly hadn't mentioned it to her secretary, or that efficient young person would have prevented such a mishap.

Upon the porch Mrs. Braithwaite and her companions presently appeared—the "family party." As the hostess's eye fell upon her guests, Michael thought he discerned that she was instantly regretful that she had permitted herself to forget her invitation. (He too was by now positive that she had done this.) He saw her appraising glance swoop over Ann, and a peculiar look appear on her face such as he had noted on other occasions—a look that says that a shock has assailed the giver of the glance. Something is here before one which one didn't expect; one's whole manner must therefore be subtly altered. The difficulty is, sometimes, to achieve the subtlety.

"Dear Ann!" now exclaimed her old friend Beatty. "I'm so delighted that you and your husband are with us at last." And she seized Ann's hands in a most cordial manner. Then she presented the others—presented them to Ann, as Ann's husband could hardly help noting. He couldn't wonder.

Mrs. Montague was, to the author, negligible, except as a familiar, colourless type of well-dressed middle-aged woman with a fatal tendency to chatter. Miss Heath, the secretary, was so far from colourless that she was at once recognized by both the Paiges as the most interesting person present. Later, Beatty told Ann that the girl was a Julia Heath of Virginia. "Of a very old family. And wasn't I lucky to get her?" Beatty added. "She can do anything! I shouldn't mind having her a bit less attractive—yet it's an advantage when we have an extra man. They all fall for her."

"You're very fortunate," Ann had assured her, adding in her own mind, "more fortunate than she."

A gaunt man with an eyeglass, by the name of Woodford, and Mr. Scarborough Braithwaite, Charlton's uncle, the oldest and richest member of the Braithwaite family, made up the small party. At the dinner table, seated between his hostess and Mrs. Montague, Michael didn't have much of a chance. Ann, between her host and the gaunt Woodford, who proved to be rather amusing, was more happily placed. Michael saw her sparkling in her own natural way, yet with a certain reserve which eminently becomes sparkling and renders it quite irresistible. He saw both Charlton and Woodford failing to

resist, and eagerly striving for her attention.

As for Miss Heath, she devoted herself to "Uncle Scar." This was the name they all gave the head of the house of Braithwaite. Evidently the two were great friends. If the young woman had had a young prince among men beside her, she couldn't have seemed better suited with a companion. If Uncle Scar had belonged to a certain well-known type of elderly rich man Michael might have had cynical doubts as to the social secretary's single-mindedness. Looking at the elder Braithwaite, no such doubts could be harboured. His style of dress was notably old fashioned, his manner of speech was straightforward and rather quaintly humorous, his bright blue eyes seemed to contain no guile. The whole effect of him was most incongruous, considering his great wealth, but nevertheless he was there, he existed. If he had been a prosperous old farmer come to town, he could hardly have conveyed a stronger impression of simple heartedness combined with wisdom and judgment.

"Well, Mikey?" It was Ann, when they were far on their way along the flower-scented path leading homeward. They were strolling very slowly, enjoying being by themselves again, as people do after an evening like the one they had just passed.

"Well, Ann?" Michael looked down at her, a shadowy figure beside him which yet expressed vigour. Ann never became wraithlike, even in moonlight.

"I liked Julia Heath."

"So did I."

"And Uncle Scar."

"So did I."

"So it doesn't matter about the rest."

"Not at all."

"The discovery of two real and delightful people in one evening is more than one can expect, isn't it?"

"Much more."

"We'll have them both down," Ann planned. "I think they'll like coming," she added.

"I hope so."

"Are these responses a sample of your retiring part in the various dialogues you engaged in to-night?" she questioned.

"A very fair sample, I fear. I got on like coal tar dripping through a small funnel both with your friend Beatty Lawton and with her coadjutor Mrs.—the lady with the dog collar around her neck."

"Montague. I'm so sorry you weren't next Miss Heath. She would have known how to draw you out."

"I didn't want to be drawn out. I wanted to look at you."

Ann laughed. "Sometimes I think, Mikey," she said, "you practise the conversation of your men in fiction on me. I can't account for it otherwise."

"Oh, no, I don't," he assured her. "It isn't the fashion for husbands in fiction these days to say anything like that. It's only in real life that one can venture to admire his wife. In realistic literature one knocks her down."

They walked along silently for a few paces; then as they neared the stone house Ann burst out in a new vein.

"Yes, we had a successful evening. But—I made up my mind, from the moment I realized Beatty had forgotten us, that we can't stay in this place longer than it will take us to find another one. The only thing on earth that made it possible for us to carry it off was the fact that we were better dressed than Beatty had expected. But she's condescending to us, just the same. Michael Paige, I will not be condescended to! If they were real friends it would be utterly different. But we can't accept favours long from people who don't care for us."

"I know that, Ann—don't you think I don't. Charlton does want us, though—I'm convinced

of that. It's Beatty who makes the situation what it is. We've got to stay till we can afford to pay a rental somewhere, but I'll work as hard as—"

"You're working too hard now, dear. And I know we've got to take this favour for awhile or starve. But I'm going to be looking all the time for some solution, and when I get it—oh, I'll put on a checked blue and white gingham and go to Beatty Lawton's door and say:—Thank you kindly, ma'am, but we're going back to our own little old dear world, which the likes of you knows nothing of!"

X

A LETTER from Julia Heath to her brother, Dale Heath, in Montana.

"DEAREST DALE:

"At last there's something to write you about in this new environment besides descriptions of the things and people I don't enjoy. I'm afraid I've been pretty detestable—not to say cynical—in my attitudes, as you have been told of them. I suppose there are plenty like Mrs. Braithwaite, and it would have been better luck than I could have expected to have found an ideal employer for my first. Anyhow, there are some new people on my horizon, and I'm hoping they'll stay there.

"Mr. Michael Paige is a writer—not one I've ever heard of, but I haven't heard of everybody. He and Mrs. Michael Paige—who is a darling—have come to live temporarily in an old house on this estate, down by the mostly unused South gate. It was formerly used as a lodge, I believe; but before that it belonged to old General Braithwaite of Revolutionary war fame, and so isn't an unworthy dwelling place

for such people as the Paiges. Mr. Paige—who is a tall, lean man with a plain, interesting face, of the thinker's type—was a college friend of Mr. Braithwaite's; and his wife was a schoolmate of Mrs. Braithwaite's. So when the Paiges were burned out of their home in the village, not long ago, Mr. Braithwaite offered them this house.

"They were asked up here for dinner last night—just with the family and a house guest. I suspect Mrs. B. didn't want them with the people she has here for her week-ends; and they wouldn't fit, anyway—they know too much! I can't imagine a clever, discerning woman like Mrs. Paige having the least interest in the sort of rich barbarians who riot here—or they in her. I can imagine the scorn that would look out of her bright brown eyes when things began to grow wild—and maudlin. As for Mr. Paige, all he would get out of it would be disgust—or material for his notebook.

"Yes, I know, Dale—you ask me why I stay in such a place. Well, I agreed to see out the season, and you know I keep my agreements. Besides, it's my first engagement, and I shall learn a great deal from it. Of course, I wish I were with people of a different type; but you needn't fear for me. The men who come here aren't much attracted by a little social secretary who

slips about among them without seeing them—when it's necessary for her to be seen at all. I'm not present at the orgies, you know—except now and then when I'm hurriedly called upon to fill in a gap. And Mr. Braithwaite himself is more or less of a gentleman—in manner, at least. And I've told you of old Mr. Scarborough Braithwaite, who *is* a gentleman, and who, I know, would befriend me in any crisis.

"But, to go back to the Paiges. Mrs. Braithwaite asked them up here informally to dinner and didn't mention it to me. She was asleep when they came, and had to be wakened and dressed in a hurry. She was cross about it—sent for me while Estelle was dressing her and asked me why I didn't keep track of her engagements. She wouldn't believe me when I told her she hadn't informed me of this one. She said rude things of the Paiges—that she supposed she had to have them because of old school acquaintance, but it was a nuisance; that they didn't amount to anything, wouldn't even be properly dressed, she knew—which was why she was having them by themselves—and so on. I was enraged with her before I saw these people, and still more enraged later, for they proved to be perfectly charming, and so very well dressed in a quiet way that Mrs. B. herself looked vulgar beside them in the sort of thing she prefers—

theatrical-looking clothes and far too much make-up.

"Dinner was the most amusing affair I've known since I came. Mrs. Paige is very quick and resourceful—no one can put her in a corner. Mrs. Braithwaite didn't exert herself a particle—she seemed to be still half asleep, though she had quite evidently been so surprised at the impressive appearance of the Paiges that she couldn't be anything but polite to them, in a subdued sort of way. Mr. Braithwaite played up nicely—he always does, especially when his wife doesn't. Mr. Paige was rather reserved, but every now and then he said something dry, with an edge on it, which startled you into taking notice of him. Mrs. Montague didn't know in the least how to talk to the Paiges. I think her education must have stopped with a finishing school—the kind that teaches little but manners. So it really fell to Mrs. Paige to be the star of the dinner, which she most exquisitely was. I saw her husband look at her with satisfaction, over and over—I couldn't wonder. The long and short of it was that the honours were all with the Paiges; it was impossible not to feel their superiority. I assure you the experience tremendously raised my opinion of the sort of people to be found in the North; up till now I had met only the Braithwaites' very florid friends,

and quite naturally I was judging all Northerners by them. But if there are Paiges up here there must be others. Their friends must be more or less like them.

"Heaps of love, Dale, boy, I hope everything goes well with your work. You're a dear to write so often; I don't know what I should do without your letters.

"JULIA."

XI

MR. SCARBOROUGH BRAITHWAITE came down from the Court to the South gate walking sturdily along the driveway, good Irish blackthorn in hand. It was nine o'clock on Saturday evening. Ann and Michael had had a long tramp and had just settled down upon the narrow porch when "Uncle Scar" appeared.

Michael jumped up to meet him.

"You're here, are you? Good!" was his abrupt greeting, as if he had known them for years. "I hoped I'd find you. Escaped from the party up there, where I couldn't hear myself think, and came along down at as good a pace as I could muster through the trees. Well, well, you're comfortable here!"

He sank into the armchair Michael brought out for him, with a long breath of relief. Then he turned a listening ear in the direction from which he had come.

"You can hear 'em, can't you!" he ascertained. "Hoped you couldn't, but that orchestra seems to be mostly saxophones. Young folks can't get

their dance music noisy enough, these days. I'm pretty old-fashioned, I expect."

"We're glad you came to us, Mr. Braithwaite," Ann assured him.

They all listened for a minute. The sounds that were ripping through the trees just then were certainly the wildest and most barbaric imaginable. Uncle Scar put his hands to his ears, groaning.

"I go to Symphony concerts," he told them. "Have the same seat season after season. That sort of thing is wind—emptiness—nothingness." He banged his blackthorn stick down heavily on the floor. Plainly, Uncle Scar wasn't all comfortable elderly contentment and complaisance —sparks could be struck from him. Because of this he was momentarily becoming more interesting.

He began to tell stories about the old days, when he had been a boy in the house where the Paiges were now living. They listened with the keenest interest, not minding how long he stayed, and understanding that he wanted to avoid returning to the din at the Court till as late an hour as possible.

It was well on toward midnight, and the visitor was in the midst of an account of one of General Braithwaite's brilliant exploits during the Revolutionary War, when Michael saw a

figure come running out of the darkness made by the trees and shrubbery and onto the long smooth stretch of lawn. It seemed to be making straight for the South gate, and it came fast. Following it fifty feet behind there shot out of the same wooded gloom another figure, and the sight of this apparent flight and pursuit, so evidently a hot one, startled Michael into an exclamation which brought his companions to attention also. Uncle Scar stopped in the middle of a sentence, and all three waited in silence till the flying figure—which in the last few rods proved to be that of a girl—dashed across the remaining space and upon the porch, there coming panting to a stop. At the same instant the pursuing figure halted, just too far away in the faint light from the house to be recognized, whether man or woman.

The girl was breathing too fast to be able to speak, except to gasp out "Excuse——" and stand trying to get her breath. She was clearly a maid from the Court, and Ann coming up to her and turning her about so that the light fell upon her face said softly: "Lena?"

She nodded, half sobbing. Ann put her arm about her shoulders. "Come in and tell me what's the matter," she said, and led her inside the house.

As by common impulse, Uncle Scar and

Michael stepped off the porch and began to walk toward the figure that had halted so near and yet so far. As they did so that figure promptly turned and began to walk away. It was a man, they could see now, and he seemed to feel it best not to linger to be engaged in conversation by two investigating persons of his own sex. He continued to depart, and they to follow him, until they were all well into the shadow of the trees. At this point he broke into a run, and in a moment was lost to view beyond the shrubbery. The two men then turned and walked back toward the house.

"Was that a servant—or a guest?" Uncle Scar now asked Michael sternly.

"It wasn't a servant," Michael hazarded. "It wasn't necessarily a guest, I suppose."

"I'll lay you two to one it was," the old gentleman growled savagely. "That little girl was running away from some young devil with a lot of liquor inside of him.—I—I—"

He became inarticulate with wrath. Michael murmured something—he didn't know exactly what. There seemed to be nothing to say. Uncle Scar went on, more quietly:

"I don't want to give you the idea, Paige, that I'm any sort of a saint. I used to keep plenty of rare old stuff in my own cellar, and pride myself on it. But I got to see the thing differ-

ently, particularly in relation to youth. I had a few lessons that sort of sunk in. The way people do it now—seemingly everywhere—is something beyond me—beyond anything I ever saw in my day. Particularly young women—girls—I can't stand it to see 'em do it—watch 'em getting under—getting gay—getting maudlin—getting sleepy—getting——Ugh-h!"

He strode along, and his blackthorn stick was in the air, emphasizing his words, more than it was upon the ground, assisting his footsteps. The younger man had to quicken his own pace to keep up with him. But Uncle Scar said no more; Michael thought he probably regretted having said so much.

When they returned to the house Ann appeared upon the porch with Lena. "You'll walk back with her, won't you, Michael?" she asked him quietly.

"Certainly," Michael assented. "Are you ready, Lena?"

"Yes, Mr. Paige," she answered, in a steady, low voice. All appearances of agitation had vanished; she was in the hands of friends.

Michael and the little maid went along together. Michael asked her no questions about her recent experience, and she volunteered no information. Just before the two rounded the last turn of the drive, a tall form came hasten-

ing toward them. Afterward Michael recognized that he had narrowly escaped being knocked down. So much red blood was in the eye of William, the chauffeur, that he couldn't clearly see the difference between Mr. Paige and the man he was hunting. Lena's quick step toward him and her low exclamation: "Billy, it's Mr. Paige," had been all that had saved her companion.

William came to a stop, his fists dropping at his sides. Lena put her hand on his arm and turned to Michael.

"Thank you very much, sir," she said. "I'm quite safe now. William'll see me to the house."

"Take good care of her, William," Michael warned him. "I'm glad you're here."

"Yes, sir. I'll be here as long as she is," William responded fervently. He had placed his hand upon Lena's with an air of proprietorship. He was still breathing quickly. It was impossible for Michael to have any further fear for Lena, for to-night, at least.

When he turned back he almost immediately encountered Uncle Scar, who must have followed more slowly up the driveway.

"All right?"

"All right."

"Thank you, Paige—thank you very much."

"Not at all. Glad to have the little walk."

They shook hands with a hearty grip and parted. Michael went on back to Ann.

"I do respect that girl," she said. "She was so relieved to get to us, yet she would say so little about what had happened."

"I suppose it was one of the inebriated young fools they have up there to-night," Michael speculated. "When Mr. Braithwaite and I walked up the road he broke out violently, for a minute, as if he couldn't help it, against heavy drinking. He didn't criticize Charlton, of course—but the thing itself."

"I wonder——" Ann stopped suddenly, pressing her husband's arm. "Why, I wonder if *he* isn't the Braithwaite who—years ago—lost a son by sudden death from—— Oh, I know now—I've heard it."

She stood looking at Michael, aghast. "What do you mean?" he questioned. "I never heard——"

"Yes, you have—you've forgotten. There was a young man in that family—Uncle Scar's only son—who fell over a staircase railing, at some drunken party somewhere on Christmas Eve. He fell on a stone-tiled hall floor and broke his neck. Somebody in the village was alluding to that old story not long ago."

"It didn't happen up here, at the Court."

"No—it was before that house was built—not here, at all."

"If you're right, it's not much wonder he feels such affairs so deeply. But why does he come up here at all, if the ways of Charl's household are as uncongenial as they must be, with that memory always with him?"

"He told you himself. It's this house," said Ann, with conviction. "This old house of his grandfather's, the General. Poor Mr. Scarborough Braithwaite is old and rich—and lonely. And he comes up to the Court where he can stay near by and wander around and live over his boyhood visits here. Delightful old man! I'm going to invite him down—to-morrow—for a week."

"You know what he'll think, if you do?"

"What will he think, Michael Paige?"

"Well—just let me remind you that he's the richest——"

"Why, Michael *Paige!* Haven't you the grace to be ashamed of that?"

"I don't know that I have," Michael said stubbornly. "He's well used to having poor people want to do him favours. If, after having known him for three days, we try to take him into the family——"

Ann's impatience with this implication knew

no bounds. "He himself all but asked to come," she cried indignantly. "He's longing to come—you know he is."

"That may be. But if you leap up and catch him round the neck and cry, 'Do come!' he'll instantly suspect you of the usual motives. As I say, he's too used to 'em. Every rich man is. Human nature is human nature, my dear. Let him 'hang around,' as he himself puts it, for some time, before you urge him to make us an actual visit. Toward the end of the summer it might be possible. But not to-morrow—if you want to keep him."

The logic of this contention evidently agreed with Ann's own knowledge of that variable quantity, human desire, and she relaxed under her husband's arm in a most gratifying manner. She even laughed.

"Great old student of psychology, you are, Mikey," she said. "I suppose you really are right. But—I'm going to make him like to come here. He's worth knowing—for himself."

XII

"BEFORE you close your study door, dear, —could you let me have some housekeeping money?"

Michael turned upon his wife with an expression on his face which would have been a scowl if it hadn't betokened more chagrin than crossness. "Ann—I haven't got it."

She stood still and looked at him. "Does that mean, Mikey, that we're down to brass tacks?"

"As a matter of fact," he answered, trying to speak less tragically, "we haven't even the tacks. If we had, we might start out and sell them."

He dug his hands down into his pockets. Ann's silence forced him to go on.

"No, I haven't been keeping anything from you, my dear. I thought we had enough to go on till that August royalty. Yesterday I found I'd made an error in keeping my check stubs. I don't know how I came to do it—but I did. That's all there is to it—we're overdrawn, instead of having a decent balance. I'm—confoundedly ashamed of having made such a fool mistake."

"Of course." Ann was quick with this. "But

why didn't you tell me yesterday we were overdrawn? I wouldn't have spent that three dollars I virtually threw away, because it went for something we didn't need. Well—I suppose you can ask for an advance on the August royalty."

"Ann—I can't. I mean—I can, of course, but it won't be much of a royalty." Michael hated to tell her this—had been dreading it for three days.

"It won't? Why, I thought—it was to be a pretty good one. You said——"

"I know I did. But the day I was in town I went to see Coppinger and asked what it was likely to be. He explained that for some reason the book had practically stopped selling since March. He was very nice about it—said quite plausibly that there'd been an unexplainable drop in the sales of almost everything on their lists—everything except one or two of the most popular books that had held up in spite of the general depression. Then—when I got that notice of an overdraft——"

Michael tried to whistle a bar or two as he turned his back and walked over to the window. It was a poor attempt. Ann got up and came after him, to stand beside him looking out—or seeming to look. Neither of them saw much of anything, though it was a heavenly day outside. There was one thing absolutely sure in

Michael's mind, of which not every husband can be so certain in a crisis. Whatever Ann said when she got around to speak, it wouldn't be in the form of a reproach.

"Well, that's tough luck," said Ann cheerfully at last. "Something's got to be done about it."

Michael turned to her and found her smiling.

"Ann," said he somewhat huskily, "you're the gamest thing I ever knew. You always are. But *what's* going to be done about it? That's what I lay awake all last night trying to work out."

She left him and took a turn herself about the room. Then she came back and began with decision:

"Mikey, you've got to come to it and let me get a job."

Michael shook his head. "I'll be hanged if I will."

"We'll both be hanged if you won't. You've got to put your ridiculous pride in your pocket at last and let me do what I've been wanting to do all these years—earn some money myself."

"What could you do?"

"Any number of things. I've an idea in my head right now."

"I don't doubt it. Your head's never lacking in ideas, if mine is. What is the ripping idea?"

"I'll not tell you. I *can* make money, Michael Paige, and I'll love doing it. I'm almost glad something's forced you to let me."

"I'm not forced yet." Michael hoped he sounded more stubborn than he felt. There certainly was something tremendously heartening about Ann's sturdy will to help him out of this blind alley.

She went off, humming a tune much more successfully than he had been able to whistle one. Michael began to walk up and down the floor, setting himself to think out a short story that should make some editor jump at it and give enough for it to bridge the chasm. Necessity is supposed to be the mother of invention—let her invent a plot for him now and show her ability. He sat down at his desk. Necessity faced him—and turned her back at the same time. His only explanation of this phenomenon was that she is a two-faced jade and not to be depended upon in a crisis.

XIII

THAT afternoon Ann put on one of the prettiest "Duponts,"—her name for her windfall—and walked off up the driveway toward the Court. Her heart was beating rather rapidly, but her determination was fixed.

When she came within sight of the house a long line of motors standing before it made it evident that something was going on—probably bridge. She turned back, but the opening of a flowery pathway tempted her, and she followed it along for some distance, disappointment uppermost in her mind. The flowers were wonderful—tall spikes of blue delphinium making a background for masses of rose and yellow phlox and purple Canterbury bells. The pathway opened suddenly upon a grassy plot with rustic seats about it, and a vista through the trees showed a far view. On one of the seats was a slim figure in white with a book in its lap, a lovely profile bent over the page. As the reader looked up Ann recognized Beatty's social secretary.

Julia Heath rose promptly, smiling. "How do you do, Mrs. Paige. I'm so glad you've found

this delightful spot—it's my favourite when I've a spare hour. Won't you come and sit down?"

Ann dropped upon the seat. "I came up to see Mrs. Braithwaite, but I can see she's entertaining."

"Yes—her Tuesday bridge club—mostly neighbours. Luckily nobody was missing to-day, so I needn't be there. Bridge on a day like this—even on the big porch and the terrace—seems a waste of time, doesn't it?"

Wrath stirred within Ann. So Beatty had a weekly bridge club—neighbours—and wouldn't ask her nearest one. Not that Ann really wanted to play bridge, on the terrace or anywhere else. She was thankful not to be asked, and charmed to be sitting beside exquisite Julia Heath in this remote spot, but she was furious with Beatty, just the same. The feeling gave an edge to her voice.

"Indeed it does, a ridiculous waste," she agreed. Then she recognized the edge and smoothed it out. "Are you reading something to fit the place?" she asked.

Miss Heath put the book in Ann's hand. The two proceeded to discuss it—a late novel from a master. Into the midst of their talk came an interruption in the form of a childish scream. Ann started up, but her companion said quickly:

"Don't be alarmed—it's only Alfred. His

nurse finds it hard to manage him. They're just over there beyond the shrubbery."

"Alfred?"

"Yes, Mrs. Braithwaite's little son."

"I didn't know," said Ann, in amazement, "that she had a little son."

"No? Perhaps that's not as strange as it seems. The child is very delicate and is seldom out where anyone sees him. He is—a nervous little chap."

"How old is he?" Ann really couldn't believe this news. How should she have lived within a mile of the Braithwaites' summer home all these years and not have known they had a son?

"Five. But he has been here very little until this summer. He spent one whole year in a children's hospital, I believe."

The screaming increased, came nearer. It sounded to Ann now more like temper than pain, and since Miss Heath seemed not to be exercised by it Ann could only wait to know what it meant. A moment later two figures came into sight, one in a nurse's uniform, the other a slender little form whose legs, like pipe stems, were kicking violently at the thick ankles of his companion. A fair head covered with a mass of bobbed curly hair was thrown back; from a twisted mouth issued passionate shrieks. The

nurse was dragging her charge along, and her harsh, insistent voice could be heard whenever the childish one caught its breath.

"Now, stop it, Master Alfred. Your mama's havin' a whole lot of ladies on the terrace—they'll hear you, and your mama'll be angry and have you punished. You little devil! Stop kickin' —stop it—or I'll lam you good and proper, and then—"

There followed a string of oaths and vulgarity. Then the speaker caught sight of the secretary and Mrs. Paige. Her tone changed quickly enough.

"See here, Master Alfred! Here's Miss Heath and a lady now. They're lookin' at you. For shame—be a good boy now. Look—they don't know what to think of you."

"I don't care—I don't care. I won't look—I hate 'em!"

"Sh-sh! Aren't you ashamed?"

The two crossed the grassy plot before the rustic seat.

The dialogue and the stormy performance went on unchecked by any putting of the case to which the nurse was equal. Ann noted that her face, which was dark and foreign, was very flushed as she continued to drag her charge along, though she now carefully controlled her words. The child looked only once, out of the

corners of his reddened eyes, at the two who were observing him, and desisted neither from his kicking nor from his outcries. The exhibition moved on out of the line of Ann's vision, and after a minute or two more the sound ceased abruptly, a closed door presumably intervening.

"Poor little chap," said Julia Heath, with a deep note of pity in her voice. "That was a real grievance. Finding the right nursemaids is the most difficult thing in the world, especially for such a child. I've come to dislike this woman very much, but I never knew she could break loose like that. Mrs. Braithwaite should be told."

Ann wanted to pour out a score of questionings, but of course it couldn't be done. Why had Beatty never mentioned this child? Wasn't she interested in him? Did he have the proper care? What sort of boy was he when not angry and unhappy? It had seemed to her that she must run to him and take him away from the cross nurse who tried to govern by threats.

As she walked home she was revolving in her mind a new plan. Her first "idea," of which she had spoken to Michael with such confidence, had really been a rather hazy one of consulting Beatty as to what sort of services she or her friends might require not already rendered by personal maids or secretaries. She was ready to

accept almost any commission, from shopping to shop-lifting! And she had been pretty sure that there would be something she could do for the indolent Beatty which no Lena or Julia Heath could cover. But now she herself had a definite suggestion to make.

XIV

ANN went again to the Court next morning at eleven. This time she was successful. A languid Beatty, propped among lacy pillows, permitted an audience. She stared enviously at Ann, appearing at her bedside.

"Take the tray away, Estelle," she ordered. "And don't bring me steamed toast again." She shifted her position, still gazing at her visitor. "Sit down, Ann. Heavens! but you look as if you never were tired in your life. You and Julia Heath are the most maddening people! What it must be—to feel like that!"

"I'm sorry you don't," Ann said. "Do you really think lying so late helps? Why don't you try a brisk walk, some morning, before the dew is off the grass?"

"Good lord, hear the countrywoman!" Beatty's laugh was shrilly derisive. "Dance all night and then be up for a brisk walk in the dew? What's dew, anyhow? I never saw any."

"It's a cosmetic," declared Ann. "And why dance *all* night? Couldn't you stop somewhere around one A. M.?"

"One A. M.! You are an innocent!—No, Ann,

—you wouldn't understand. One has to have some excitement—couldn't get on without it. Not that it's exciting, but it's better than going to bed at sundown, as I suppose you do. Well——"

She didn't add, "To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit?" but Ann felt the unspoken question. She plunged in.

"Beatty, I came to ask you if possibly, among the various forms of service you require, you have, or might have soon, a place for me. I'm looking for a part-time job—to put it frankly. Could I, by any chance, shop for you, for instance? I'm really, I think, rather a discriminating shopper."

It was like Ann Paige, now that she had come to it, to state her case thus. Not for her any attempted circumlocutions leading up to her request. She was not a "decayed gentlewoman," anxious to establish the fact that she really didn't need to work but wanted something to fill in her time. She did need to work, and though asking for it from Beatty Braithwaite had been a difficult thing to bring herself to, it was the only possibility she could at present conceive of which would leave her sufficiently free to carry on her home-keeping and so keep Michael fit for his own difficult task.

Beatty lay looking at her in amazement. She sat up a little and tucked a small silk pillow into a more supporting place behind her limp back, and pushed herself against it, and still looked.

"Is this a joke?" she inquired, at last.

"No sort of a joke." Ann looked Beatty straight in the eyes. "I'm seriously hunting for work—part-time, as I say."

"But you couldn't do shopping for me, my dear Ann. Not that—" some slight compunction must have seized Beatty, for she went on more carefully if not very tactfully,—"not that you don't know how to dress quite nicely yourself—"

Ann suppressed a tendency to swallow. In school days she would have come back with something fiery. "Thank you," she murmured, ironically.

"But that . . . You see, I'm quite a difficult person to shop for. I—do most of my shopping in Paris. When I do run down to New York for things I suppose I'm very choosey. I have a great many things brought out—models stand about for me. As for stuff for the house—I always have a decorator out for consultation. And when I buy jewels——"

"I wasn't anticipating buying jewels for you," Ann explained. "I was thinking only of small

but necessary commissions. Clothes for little Alfred, perhaps; uniforms for his nurse——"

But here Beatty turned an astonished, even horrified gaze upon her visitor.

"What—how—how did you come to—to see him?" She was actually stammering. Ann couldn't understand the strange look which had come over her face.

But there was nothing to do now except to plunge ahead. The shopping suggestion had been merely a way of leading up to Ann's real idea. She had wanted to come about it by means of a course which should develop naturally into contact with Alfred. Through taking measurements of him for his little garments, buying toys for him, and winning his liking, eventually she might easily propose doing something important for a child whom she conceived of as both spoiled and neglected.

"I just happened," she said, taking the more straightforward method she felt now she should adopt, "to see your little son with his nurse. It was yesterday. I had come over to see you on this business of asking for a part-time job from you or some of your friends. Finding you had guests I stopped to talk with Miss Heath for a few minutes in that lovely spot by the sun dial. The child and his nurse came by, but before

they saw us I couldn't help overhearing some terribly rough and vulgar words from her—the sort of thing which pretty completely gives away the character of the person who speaks them. I knew you couldn't know. And I wondered if you would care to have me try to find a more suitable nurse for him, possibly—and—Well, you see, when one begins to think things out, one idea leads to another. I didn't know whether you had a governess for him yet, and if you hadn't whether you might like to have him receive some simple lessons, just for an hour in the mornings. I—really, I can't tell you how the child interested me. I should like immensely to try to teach him.—And there, Beatty, you have my whole idea—very bluntly put, I'm afraid. I'm the sort of person who leaps at things, I know. But you know exactly what I was like, in school days, and you'll understand exactly how when I once get a plan into my head I have to get it out at once—or drive it in deeper."

She had been pouring all this out, in her own somewhat staccato fashion, to get it over and see what would be the other person's reaction. She realized as she finished that a queer sort of colour had been gradually spreading over Beatty's face and neck—not a becoming colour, it was too purplish a shade for that. Her gaze

fell away from Ann's. She put out her hand and reached for a handkerchief lying on the small table by her side, and raised it to her eyes. Suddenly she began to sob, and having begun, sobbed more. Ann was disconcerted.

"I'm sorry," she said simply, and waited for the storm to cease. It was some time before it did so. Meanwhile, Beatty put out her hand blindly and groped for her bell, on an electric cord. Ann rose and pressed the button for her. Estelle appearing, Beatty brokenly requested something which Ann didn't understand. Estelle did, and brought a pinkish liquid in a glass. Having drunk this, Beatty presently calmed. In course of time she dismissed the maid and lay again looking mournfully at Ann.

"Perhaps I should have gone," Ann said concernedly. "But having brought on this attack, I thought I should stay till you were better. Shall I go now? You'd rather not discuss the matter?"

"Oh, I don't mind. I suppose you didn't know. You'll have to, now. Poor little Alfred isn't a normal child. It's the sorrow of my life. He's so frightfully nervous and high-strung it amounts to a disease. We keep him away from everybody. I don't know how you came to see him."

"I saw him as I described to you," Ann repeated, wondering more than ever. "Of course, if he's a nervous little chap you do well to keep

him outdoors. He looked an interesting child, to me, in spite of the temper he was showing at the moment—which seemed to me much the fault of the nurse. He must be well worth teaching. Forgive me, Beatty, I don't mean to be persistent, in my own cause. But if you've been unhappy over him perhaps you'll be glad to have this first impression of mine—that he *is* a normal child, but needs a bit of the right sort of training. I'm sure that nurse is giving him the wrong sort. You don't mind my saying that? I know how difficult it is to keep track of the ways of such people when they are alone with a child. It was my just happening on this scene that makes me feel so strongly that something could be done to better the situation."

Beatty shook her head. "He can't be taught anything. We've never tried him with a governess—his mind isn't fit for study. But we've had every sort of nurse, and they've tried to teach him little things. They couldn't, that's all. It's a hopeless case."

"Who says it is?" Ann asked boldly. Somehow she couldn't quite believe this.

"Why—people who are supposed to know. Doctors—specialists. That is—— Goodness! We don't need to have anybody *tell* us anything—It *shows*. Try to talk with him for five minutes and you'll find out for yourself."

In Ann's ears at this moment sounded certain phrases and she heard again the angry little boy shriek: "I don't care—I won't look—I hate 'em!" Not the mouthings of an imbecile, certainly, were such defiances as these.

"I should *like* to talk with him," she said calmly, "if you wouldn't mind. I can get on with most children. You know—or perhaps you didn't—we had a little boy of our own. He was three when we lost him."

"I believe I heard of that," Beatty admitted. "Well, I suppose you might. The nurse I have now is the last of a long line—she can't do anything at all with him. You wouldn't want to take her place? You're not really serious?"

"I couldn't give all my time," Ann explained, "so I couldn't be a nurse. But I could come in the mornings and try to teach him. A good nurse is very important, though, if I am to accomplish anything. He shouldn't have one who would undo anything I might do for him."

Beatty sighed heavily and turned her head. "Oh, heavens!" she complained. "They come and go fast enough, without my sending anybody away who can manage him at all. After all, I thought this last one probably did as well as any of them. They're all alike."

"You could find somebody much better," Ann

couldn't keep from saying. "I never heard——"

"Oh, they're all alike, I tell you. I don't much blame them. Soft words won't do it—they have to speak sharply. If I let this one go——"

"Would you like to have me try to find somebody?" Ann again suggested. "I'm quite sure I could—and I should take infinite pains, of course."

Beatty now weariedly considered this offer. Clearly the line of least resistance was the one she preferred.

"I suppose I ought to consult Charl," she murmured. "But then, he always leaves engaging people with me. It's a frightful disappointment to him to have a son like that. He hardly ever sees Alfred—can't bear to."

Ann experienced a sense of extreme distaste for the Braithwaites, but she tried to smother it. Somehow, she couldn't believe that the child she had seen was mentally deficient, as Beatty, without actually saying it, had implied. Spoiled, mismanaged, deprived of all childish rights in his parents, he might be; but more abnormal than such disadvantages would be certain to make him she doubted if he was. Knowing Beatty as she had, she was sure that the boy's mother herself was more or less responsible for this tragedy—if it were one. She thought it

stopped short of that—or could be turned into something else by the right treatment. More and more she longed to try her hand.

She waited, while Beatty, frowning, seemed to be coming to a decision. Ann felt, meanwhile, that though she herself might be playing an interfering, almost dictatorial part, it was worth it for the sake of that most appealing object, a little child who needed a champion. And presently Beatty turned to her with the air of one who is thankful to find the easiest way out of a difficulty.

"Well—you may go ahead and find a better nurse—if you can, which I doubt. As for the lessons, you can try those too, though I warn you you'll soon be glad to give them up. Of course it's very good of you to show so much interest."

"It's a very real interest," said Ann, taking her leave.

She went home walking on air. Putting one's pride in one's pocket certainly was a wise thing to do, now and then. And after all, why should she have had any pride to pocket? This would be a job worth attempting—interesting, challenging, important. It was great luck! She *might* have had to try to sell things, from door to door, she said to herself, taking out of sheer relief the

most exaggerated view of the situation. She would have done even that before she would have given up. She would—but this was far better. Even Michael couldn't mind her doing this —at least, not much.

XV

"WHO'S that?"

A taxicab had turned in at the South gate. On the side porch Ann and Michael and Mr. Scarborough Braithwaite were finishing supper. A few days earlier, Uncle Scar, ranging about remote and unkept acres of his nephew's estate, had stepped into a concealed hole and wrenched his ankle badly. Hearing of this, Ann had seized upon the occasion to invite him down to the old house of his affections. He had accepted joyfully and was spending the days upon the porch with his foot resting comfortably on a pillow.

A vigorous looking figure descended from the taxicab, and in a flash Ann was off to meet it, her face radiant with joy. She returned clinging to the arm of a comparatively young, sunburned giant.

"Michael, it's Dan—back from Korea. Mr. Braithwaite, this is my brother, Dan Gaysworthy."

Michael and Uncle Scar rose to the occasion. They shook hands, they said they were glad he had come. They regarded him with strong in-

terest. He appeared to be worth it. Dr. Daniel Gaysworthy had been in Korea for eight years; he was away when Ann had married; he hadn't known Michael. His infrequent letters had been read aloud by Ann, and Michael had received the impression of a busy surgeon who considered letter writing the least important of many crowding duties.

Presently the new arrival had washed and brushed. "I'm just off the ship and the train," he said. "Couldn't bring myself to stop long enough anywhere to get some new clothes and a haircut. Do that next thing."

"It doesn't matter how you look since you're here," Ann cried. "Sit down, Danny—there's lots of fried chicken and shortcake left, and I'm making you some coffee. Tell us all about it."

"I'm home to brush up," Dr. Gaysworthy explained, rapidly consuming the food set before him. "We do our best to keep up with the latest methods, but there's nothing like an ocular demonstration, now and then. I wanted to see two or three of the big men work, over here."

"Of course you didn't need a vacation for yourself!"

"Hadn't time for one—taken by itself. But I'll consider both points gained if I get a new trick or two."

"But you'll stay here for awhile, Dan?"

"Long as my conscience will let me," he agreed. "This is a jolly place. Let's go for a walk."

He was looking off up the winding road through the great trees. Ann was laughing.

"It's a long time since I've seen you," she said, "but you're exactly the same Dan. Planning the next thing to do before you've fairly begun the one in hand."

"But I always finish the one in hand, don't I?" he demanded.

"You always did. You can take Michael for a walk while I wash the dishes." Ann began to clear the plates.

Her brother jumped up. "That's no way—taking them out in your hands. Haven't you got a tray?"

He found his way to the kitchen, looked into the pantry, and returned with a tray, upon which he piled all the dishes left on the table and carried them out all together. Ann followed him, while Uncle Scar said to Michael:

"That's a great chap. He behaves like a breeze from the Northwest."

"He does," Michael agreed. "He's at the head of the biggest American hospital in that part of the world."

"Looks it. I like 'em like that."

The surgeon from Korea wiped the dishes with such dispatch that they were soon done. While he performed this task, his eyes roamed about the kitchen.

"Lot's of waste steps here, Ann," he commented. "What's the idea of hanging the hand towel ten feet away from the sink?"

"There happened to be a nail there," Ann said gaily, "and none here. I've meant to put one in."

"Where are the nails—and a hammer?"

"Oh, I'll get them for you. They're here, in a drawer."

Her glance indicated the drawer, and while she scraped at the frying pan in which the chicken had been browned, Dan drove the nail. The sound brought Michael out.

"Is she putting you to work so soon, brother-in-law?" he inquired.

"He's putting himself to work," Ann answered for him, for Dan was investigating the kitchen clock.

"This isn't on the level," he said. "No wonder it doesn't keep time." And in two minutes he had whittled a prop for one side of the clock, had set it according to his watch, and closed the case with a snap. "Now let's go for that walk,"

he said. "If we don't, I shall be swamped with your odd jobs."

The three came out upon the porch again. Dan paused by the side of Uncle Scar.

"Sprained ankle?" he inquired.

"Mightn't it be gout?" countered Mr. Braithwaite, looking up at the visitor with keen interest in his face.

"No—you're no subject for that. You keep yourself in condition by your activities," the surgeon pronounced promptly. "That's the way to do—only way."

He and Ann went swinging off. Michael stood and watched them go. They were talking as they walked—marched, would be the more exact word, for Dr. Gaysworthy's pace was one that covered the ground. Dan was seeing everything, asking about everything, answering Ann's eager questions.

"Getting on well, Ann?" was one of his own inquiries, accompanied by a searching look. "Answer honestly. I like Michael's face, you know, and I expect I'll like the man. Doesn't matter whether I do or not, since you do. Not my sort—couldn't be, the quiet, studious, literary type. But—are you getting on well? That's what I want to know."

"Of course we are, Dan. Michael's a dear,

and I'm proud of him as I can be. He's a wonderfully good balance wheel for me, who come of the explosive Gaysworthys."

"Tell me all about it," Dan commanded. "You both look worried."

"Why, Dan! What nonsense!"

"No, it isn't nonsense. I can see behind people's faces and hear behind their voices. Always could. Something worrying you both. What is it? Don't tell me it's none of my business, because it is."

Ann looked curiously at her brother. He didn't look like a diviner—he was big, fair haired, blue eyed—there was nothing of the steel-trap expression in his face—it was not a "piercing eye" that met hers. But somehow she felt that he did see almost into her mind, and she remembered that he had had that faculty of old. Not much use to try to evade him.

"It's only money matters," she answered then frankly, and told him the situation, beginning back at the story of the fire, with the lapsed insurance. "And now I'm planning to do some outside work to help out. Michael doesn't like it—it hurts his pride. But it's all right, isn't it, Dan? You'll be sensible enough to agree with that? I'm persisting, you see. I was going into town to-day to try to find the right nurse for a

little boy up here at the Braithwaites', so that I can teach him small lessons and try to make a normal child of him."

He asked for the whole of this story, too, and got it. Ann's recital ended with the reiterated question as to the rightness of her proposed course.

"Absolutely right," was his verdict. "Anything that helps to make marriage the complete partnership it ought to be is right. And the thing you're proposing to do is more than right, it's a good bit of service to humanity. I'd like to see the boy; I could tell in two minutes whether he's normal or not. Why not take me to the house and present me to Mrs. Braithwaite?"

Ann laughed. "Dan, you'd walk into the White House if you heard of a case needing attention, wouldn't you?"

"I probably should. But what could be more natural, since you live at the Braithwaites' gate and know them well."

He was looking through the trees toward the big house, and broke off to say, "Here she comes now." He and Ann were at a point in their walk which had brought them near the house. A figure had just come out of a side entrance and was rapidly approaching along the driveway.

"That's not Beatty, it's—I think it's Miss Heath," Ann said. "She's Beatty's secretary."

The two stood still. Julia Heath called to them.

"Please come—we need you!"

Dan was off ahead of Ann. Miss Heath began to explain, but Dan took hold of her arm, turned her around, and started for the house with her.

"Tell me as you go," he commanded. "Somebody hurt? I'm a doctor."

"He's my brother," Ann put in, coming up, but Miss Heath needed no introduction.

"We can't wake Mrs. Braithwaite," she explained quickly. "I wasn't frightened at first—she takes so much to make her sleep. But usually she can be roused. This time she can't be. And Mr. Braithwaite's away, and we can't get hold of a doctor."

"We'll wake her," said Dan confidently. "Keep cool."

He was cool enough himself. He might be an "explosive Gaysworthy," but, after the manner of his profession, any emergency put quiet into the expression of his character. He strode on toward the house, asking concise questions, so that by the time he reached it he was in possession of all that Julia Heath knew, as to what might have caused the condition she described. Ann gathered that Beatty was a drug taker—drugs to stimulate and carry her through occa-

sions, drugs to soothe, drugs to induce sleep. Dan made but one comment.

"Of course. What goes up must come down. All right. Take us to her, and stand by for orders."

In the lower hall he cast aside his hat and went up the stairs feeling in his pockets. Ann followed the secretary and her brother past several scared servants, into Beatty's great, frivolous-looking bedroom, all rose-colour and ivory and silver. Mrs. Montague met them at the door, crying and wringing her hands. Her frightened face was pasty.

"I always knew she took too much," she moaned. "No one could stop her—she would do it."

Dan stood by the bed—Beatty's bed, with its fine tumbled linen and lace-edged pillows—and took one comprehensive survey of Beatty's strange-looking face. He listened to her stertorous breathing, drew up her eyelids, felt her pulse, glanced at two small phials on a table by her bedside, and then began firing orders.

"Ann, send somebody who can run down to your house to bring a tan-leather case out of the larger handbag."

"I will."

"Miss Heath, can you keep your head and help me?"

"Yes, Dr. Gaysworthy."

"All right. Send everybody away except the best maid you have in the house. Then get me . . ." and he named a list of things he wanted, beginning with cold water.

For three hours thereafter Ann watched her brother work. He had taken off his coat and rolled up his sleeves, figuratively as well as literally. She and Julia and Lena, the upstairs maid, did the same. At no time did any of them venture to ask Dan whether he expected to save his patient, nor could they judge by his face. He was using every means at his disposal both to rouse her and to prevent collapse. Finally, after an examination of her heart and a look at her eyes, which seemed to tell him most, the grim expression on his face relaxed, and he nodded to Ann.

"She's coming along," he said.

Finally, Beatty's eyes opened slightly, to close again, and her heavy head moved upon the pillow. A moment later her eyes opened again, and her dazed look rested upon Dan's face.

"All right," he said cheerfully. "I'm a doctor. I'm Ann's brother."

Presently, for the first time, sitting beside the bed, he seemed to see somebody except his patient. He looked across at Julia Heath, who was

standing at the foot of the bed watching Beatty, her fine brows still knit, but her lips relaxing into a half-smile at sight of the opening eyes. Her glance turned to him, and he held it with prompt low-toned speech.

"You've been corking good help," he said.

"It was mighty fortunate you and Mrs. Paige were at hand," she answered. "When I ran out of the house I hadn't an idea where I could find a doctor."

"What would you have done if you hadn't? Something efficient, I'll wager."

She shook her head. "All I should have known how to do would have been to try to rouse her. I'd tried already. We should have failed, I'm sure."

"Possibly. That would depend on how much of an addict she is. We'll find that out later."

The half-whispered conversation was ended by a low moan from Beatty.

"Not very happy?" questioned the doctor. "You're all right, Mrs. Braithwaite, and I don't want you to go to sleep again. A cup of strong coffee now will help that. Lena—the blackest coffee the cook can make."

By and by he and Ann went downstairs, leaving the secretary in charge.

"I'll look in this afternoon," Dan said. "By that time she can listen to me—and, by heck,

she's going to. Meantime, don't leave a bottle or a pill where she can get it. She'll be restless as this wears off; you'll have trouble on your hands. I can get a nurse out, you know, if you want one."

"Unless she's in danger still, I don't," said Julia Heath. "With a houseful of servants, and one of them Lena, we don't need anybody."

"She's in no danger now—except from wanting more dope, which she will. Don't hesitate to call in a manservant, if necessary, to keep her in hand."

Dan and Ann went away. Outside the house Dan turned to take a look back at it.

"Pretentious place, isn't it?" he observed. "The kind that says, *'Look at me!'* What's the use of ostentation? It's the most superfluous thing in the world. But—there's *one* thing in that house——"

He seemed to fall into a muse. Ann waited, confident that she'd be more likely to know if she didn't inquire, "What's that?" Something seemed to tell her, anyhow.

Halfway to the South gate Dan stood still.

"Ann," he demanded, "take a good look at me. Do I look any different than I did when I went into that blamed gorgeous fool house back there?"

Ann obediently gazed at him. "You look ex-

cited, Danny dear," she told him. "Your eyes have black centres in them right out here in the daylight. Your hair's still a little damp above the ears. Your collar is mashed down, and your tie is disreputable. You look somewhat as if you'd been in a fight—which, of course, you have."

Dan nodded. "The kind of fight that makes you mad, it's the result of such utter folly. Well, that's all you see, is it?"

"Why, of course. I can't see into your mind. I wish I could."

"You do? Why?"

"It would be so interesting," said Ann innocently—in effect.

"You can't guess at its state?"

"No—not really."

"Partly?"

"Julia Heath's an unusually attractive girl, isn't she?"

Dan frowned. "Oh, you think *that's* it!"

"Is it?"

"No—it isn't!" he shouted.

"Very well. You don't need to deny it so loudly, dear."

He strode on again. Ann had to walk her fastest to keep up with him. She was reflecting that he hadn't seen any girls like Julia Heath in Korea, and that he was probably, being de-

cidedly human, more or less starved for the sight of girls and women of the type to be found everywhere in his native country, to which he had been so long a stranger. She couldn't blame him.

XVI

MRS. MICHAEL PAIGE and Dr. Daniel Gaysworthy were going in to Boston together. It was several days after the upset at Braithwaite Court, and life there had apparently resumed its ordinary course, except that all entertaining had been cancelled for at least the coming fortnight. Charlton was still away. Beatty was up and about in a languid, intensely irritable condition, with which the members of her household found it difficult to deal. She had insisted on Dr. Gaysworthy's continuing with her case, though he had advised her to summon her regular physician.

"I haven't any," she said fretfully. "Of course, we've all been under the care of one specialist after another since we were born. But there isn't any one, more than another, we could call our 'regular physician.' I didn't suppose anybody had one, in these days."

"Ought to have," he had said in his curt way. "One man who knows you from the ground up—knows your whole history—can reckon with all your idiosyncrasies. I admit the old family doctor's out of fashion. But you don't want me,

Mrs. Braithwaite. I'm too square-toed for you. Besides, I shall be here only off and on through the summer."

"But I like you," said Beatty, in an ingratiating tone, and smiled at him. From his point of view it was a silly smile and he didn't care for it. Drug addicts always made him angry, and though this one wasn't really far gone, he was antagonized by her whole personality and much preferred to be through with her case.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"You're brutal with me, Dr. Gaysworthy. But I want you to keep on with me and get me out of this horrible state. I—think I shall die if you don't."

She put out her hand toward him as she spoke, closing her eyes, her lips trembling. Her face, with no rouge or powder upon it, was far from attractive, but that was not the reason why the surgeon from Korea didn't take the hand. Instead, he rose abruptly and began to walk up and down the floor, delivering an ultimatum which began with: "Very well, then. Listen!" And ended with: "It's in your own hands. You can go on—and become a doddering old woman before your time—a wreck of a woman before you're forty. Or you can take a brace and pull out of this. It's up to you—and nobody else. Get that, Mrs. Braithwaite?"

Beatty had seemed to "take the brace." Dan recognized, more or less, that she was intensely attracted by him. As he sat by her bedside, or—as happened more often—strode about the room with his hands in his pockets, firing broadsides of opinions or commands at her, she was watching his strong and interesting face, the set of his lips, the flash of his eye, far more absorbedly than she was listening to his words. Since he didn't like her, her attitude didn't please him. She learned, after a few failures, that it was of no use to put out a hand toward him—he wouldn't take it and hold it. Of still less use was it to say flattering things to him; the one method of getting his interest was to obey his rulings.

She discovered very soon, however, that there was a way in which to keep him after his call upon her was over. On his third visit he had suddenly inquired about her son and had asked to see the child. Alfred had been brought in by his nurse, and Dan had spent the better part of an hour in examining him. On the face of it it hadn't looked like an examination, it had been more like play; but it had resulted in a definite opinion, though this he hadn't communicated to Alfred's mother. But he had confirmed the plan of Ann's attempting to procure a different type of nurse for him, and of herself becoming a sort of part-time governess. Thereafter, each

time Dan came to the Court, Beatty had the child brought in and lay watching the pair with eyes of which Dan didn't like the look, when he happened to glance at them. He didn't see in them anything maternal.

"I'm not coming any more, Mrs. Braithwaite," he announced on the morning of the seventh day. "You don't need me, and I must be off on affairs of my own—for which I came from Korea. I'm going to take my sister in to Boston to-morrow, and we'll try to find that nurse for the boy. It's time you were on your own again, you know. Get outdoors every day—and keep out. I said it before, and I say it again—no doctor or nurse can keep you from taking drugs if you're bound to do it. But I've some hope that you'll show yourself a woman by getting yourself in hand. I'm sorry your husband's still away—I'd have liked a talk with him, about both you and the boy. But one thing I want to say to you:—if you break this habit off, I think he'll make fewer trips away."

In spite of the "square-toedness" of this speech, Beatty had hated to see him go. She was fascinated by him, and chagrined that she couldn't get anything from him except his professional attention. But when he shook hands with her, in taking his leave, she had clung to

his hand, murmuring: "Oh, Doctor—I'm so grateful to you!"

After a moment he had withdrawn his hand, but his voice hadn't been hard as he answered: "All right, thank you. Prove that gratitude by obeying orders, and I'll believe you."

Then next morning, he and Ann had walked into the village and taken one of the local trains for Boston.

It was at noon that Michael Paige, fidgetting about his study in search of inspiration for the closing paragraph in a chapter of crises, had had his work abruptly interrupted by a summons from Uncle Scar. That gentleman was no longer confined to his chair, but was hobbling about with his blackthorn stick and one crutch.

"Come out here, Michael—here's a pretty howdy-de-do!" he called.

Michael went out. He found Julia Heath, dressed as women dress for a trip to town in midsummer, quiet of manner but evidently keyed to tension. One of the Braithwaite motors stood in front of the house. Uncle Scar was looking much disturbed, and was first to explain.

"Beatty's missing!" he announced. "Confound these women—you never know what they're going to do next."

"Missing!" Michael ejaculated. He stared at Julia.

"Early this morning," the secretary said, "she told us she'd had a telegram from her husband asking her to meet him in New York to-night. He's been out to the Pacific Coast, you know, on this last trip. She had Estelle pack her bags, and ordered William and the motor to take her and the maid in to Boston. They got off by ten o'clock, and half an hour ago came a wire for her. Mrs. Montague opened it, and it was from Mr. Braithwaite in Los Angeles. So—you see—it couldn't have been true that he wired her to meet him in New York to-night. Nobody in the house knew of any telegram's coming early this morning—we're sure none did. So now I'm going to run into town—Boston—to see if I can find her."

"Find her!" Uncle Scar ejaculated. "Any idea where to look?"

"Why, I think she's going to New York," Julia said positively. "She loves New York, and is always running down. There's a good train at two o'clock—she's apt to take it. But even if she's already gone, I shall follow her. She's told me several times the name of the hotel where she always stays."

"If she's run away," objected Uncle Scar,

"she's not gone where she usually goes—unless she's not very clever. But you may be right."

"I think she's going to New York," Julia repeated. "It's not that that troubles me, it's what she may be intending to do after she gets there. Somebody needs to be on hand. She's in a very nervous state, and she may take any sort of notion—especially if she should begin the drugs again. I'm afraid she will do that, in spite of all Dr. Gaysworthy said about the danger of it. She's too wretched without them. We thought, Mr. Paige, you and Mrs. Paige ought to understand the situation, so that if Mrs. Braithwaite should come back while I am away, you would know what to do. Mrs. Montague is unwilling to take any responsibility. And there's little Alfred."

"Anything either Ann or I can do," Michael said, "we'll be only too glad to do. When she comes back to-night she'll run up and see if things are right with the boy."

"Thank you. Of course he's on our minds, too. . . . Mr. Braithwaite—I'm sure I should be starting."

"Suppose we drive in with you, Paige and I," proposed Uncle Scar. "I'd like the drive, and it would be a little sharing of responsibility. You ought not to have it all."

Five minutes later the three were on their way to Boston.

Ann Paige, sitting in the great South Station, with a pleasant-faced Swedish woman by her side, was suddenly confronted by Julia Heath.

"Mrs. Paige—I'm so glad I found you. I'm taking the two o'clock train for New York to try to find Mrs. Braithwaite. I've no time to explain, but your husband and Mr. Scarborough Braithwaite will do that. May I leave little Alfred in your care? Mrs. Montague's so upset she'll be of no use, and I don't trust the nurse. Oh—have you found one?" Her quick glance scanned the round Swedish face approvingly. "But, even so, someone else should be in charge. I don't know how long I'll be gone.—Here comes Mr. Paige—he'll take you back in the car. He's been getting my ticket. I've no time to lose, you see. Good-bye—and thank you."

Ann was on her feet. The big clock was pointing to four minutes of the hour. Her wits worked quickly. An emergency—and no time to talk about it. A promise was all that was asked of her.

"Of course I'll see to everything, Miss Heath."

They were near the gates, the crowd had almost ceased pressing through. As Julia vanished

down the line toward her car, a familiar incisive though low voice hailed Ann.

"What's all this? Somebody taking this train and you and Michael and Uncle Scar seeing 'em off? Why shouldn't I be in on it?"

Ann turned to meet Dan's interested eye. "Tell him, Michael," she commanded. "He knows more about it than I," she assured Dan.

Michael began deliberately. He saw no cause for haste, now that the train was caught. He and the others had arrived in good season, had searched the station carefully for Mrs. Braithwaite, and, failing, had determined on this course of action, the advisability of which had been thoroughly discussed on the way in.

"Mrs. Braithwaite has gone off, rather mysteriously," was his opening. "Miss Heath——" But he got no further. He hadn't reckoned on the fact that he was speaking to an "explosive Gaysworthy."

Dan interrupted. "Was that Miss Heath you were seeing off?"

Michael and Ann nodded simultaneously. Afterward Ann said she knew, at that instant, what Dan would do. His eyes were on the clock, which stated uncompromisingly that the train would move out of the station in one minute more.

"Mrs. Braithwaite's my patient. If she's done

that, I know pretty accurately the state of her mind and nerves by now. Too much for Julia Heath to handle alone. I'll go too. No time for a ticket. Good-bye."

Michael didn't expect to see him get through the gate. Rules were strict, and bribing not supposed to be allowed. Dan didn't even try that. He looked at the uniformed ticket-taker and stated his case in a few crisp words.

"Got to take this train—I'm a doctor. Patient's escaped. Let me through?"

And walked past, unhindered. Somehow, officials mostly know when they're told the truth.

XVII

JULIA HEATH, sitting in the "day coach" of the New York train—Michael had tried in vain to get her a last minute reservation in a Pullman on the crowded train—was staring steadily out at the passing landscape. The day was very warm, and the window was open. The sleeve of her dark blue crêpe fluttered in the breeze as she rested her arm upon the windowsill and tried to think what she should do if she failed to find Mrs. Braithwaite at her accustomed hotel. The same breeze stirred the soft dark hair above her ears and cooled her cheek, but a drift of cinders suddenly came thickly with it, and presently she tried to close the window.

A hand came from behind her, and an arm in a grey homespun sleeve showed the play of muscles under the cloth as it put forth all its strength in the effort, which was unsuccessful.

"I'm afraid I'll have to come into that seat to do it," said a voice, unexpectedly familiar to Julia's ears. She turned quickly and looked into the face of Dr. Daniel Gaysworthy.

"Why, how——" she was beginning, startled; but he interrupted her.

"Just let me settle this window, and then I'll tell you."

She moved out into the aisle, and the window shortly came down. Dan brushed off his sleeve and wiped his hands on his handkerchief. He returned to his own seat, sat down, and leaned forward.

"I didn't intend to force my company on you, Miss Heath," he said. "But I heard just enough of the reason for your journey to think I ought to come along and stand by to help if you needed me."

"You heard—and came along?" she repeated. "Why—you weren't there when I saw Mrs. Paige—and you couldn't have known before that. Do you mean—you heard and came *after* I'd taken this train?"

He nodded. "I'll have to admit I'm that sort of a hair-trigger person—when I get the idea that if I'm not hair-trigger I may miss being on hand. Mrs. Braithwaite's been under my care. When I dismissed myself from her case I was far from easy about her. I learned just now that she'd done what might turn out to be something rash, and that you were following her. There didn't seem to be any reason why I should wait to get all the details, take time to weigh the

thing in the scales of reason and justice—and miss the train. There's nothing I hate to see much worse than the rear end of a train I ought to have caught and didn't."

He could see the astonishment in her face give way to a very amused and charming appreciation of his friendliness, and also to relief.

"I'm very glad you came," she said frankly. "To tell the truth, I was beginning to wonder what I could do if I didn't find her at her hotel. When I started I was sure I should, for she's rather a creature of habit. But the more I've thought of it the more I'm convinced that she had some other plan than just getting down to New York and spending a few days away from home. It's no time of year to want to stay in the hot city."

"Tell me all you know," he commanded, and Julia obeyed. When he had the few details she could give him he sat thinking them over in silence for a little.

"One thing is certain," he said presently. "We can't be far behind her. If, as you think, she caught the train before this, she won't have had time to do much more than go to her hotel and make her arrangements before we get there. She's still weak from this breakdown; she can't dash about much. And this French maid you say she has with her has no brains—she's not

capable of taking charge. We'll catch up with them—don't worry. Anyhow, she thinks she has everybody fooled by that supposed wire from her husband—she won't realize there's any need for hurry. Except to get hold of her drug. More than likely we'll find her at the hotel, receiving a visit from some unprincipled doctor whom she'll cajole into writing her a prescription—or getting the stuff for her. Well—I'd like nothing better than to come in on that!"

He closed his lips grimly on this assertion. But when he opened them again it was not to follow up this line of thought, but to plunge into a subject quite different.

All the while, from his point of vantage, he was studying the lovely line of a cheek, the delicately strong modelling of a profile, the occasional turn of a head and the accompanying brief glance of a black lashed grey-blue eye. As Ann had understood, he had seen nothing like these in Korea.

As for Julia Heath, she was acutely conscious of his sturdy companionship. The actual time in hours and minutes of talk between the two measured not more than a quarter of the whole period consumed by the journey. Dr. Gaysworthy read his newspaper—a big Boston daily—from one end to the other, or so it appeared. Miss Heath buried herself for a half hour at a

time in a small blue-leather covered book, whose title meant nothing to the eyes behind her. Surgeons active in foreign hospitals have little leisure for the pursuit of literature, and Dr. Gaysworthy had for years been busier than most men of his profession. There was another thing he hadn't had time for, and this was the opportunity to note the shape of an eyebrow or the turn of an ankle, of the true American type, in the occasional tourist visitor to his hospital. It was possible he did not quite understand how hungry he was for the sight of beauty as he had known it in his countrywomen, or for the note of a woman's voice speaking his own language as he had heard it at home. Anyhow, he knew it now—knew it suddenly and devastatingly, after the long exile and abstinence.

The train drew in. However long Dan Gaysworthy had been away from the complications of an arrival in the metropolis of his country, he seemed to have no difficulty in finding his way. He had Julia Heath down the platform and up the ramp, through the concourse and out of the exit to the taxi level as fast as though he had left New York but yesterday. In no time the pair were being whirled away in an orange cab to the hotel whose name Julia had given

him, and Dan was saying, as he glanced out at the flying street corners:

"A stern chase always did excite the hunter in me. If it weren't such a serious matter, I could almost hope the trail won't end tamely at this hotel."

Julia smiled at the boyish eagerness in his tone, but then she spoke soberly.

"Somehow, I'm afraid it won't, Dr. Gaysworthy. I can't be so sure, now, that Mrs. Braithwaite came to New York at all. Perhaps we're actually in for an adventure—though I don't hope it—I'm too anxious. I can't help feeling she's my responsibility, though I'm only her secretary."

"I know. Some people shirk responsibility—others not only accept but assume it against their own wishes, in this singular world. That's what you and I are doing now.—This the hotel? Well—I *have* been away from New York a long while!"

He was softly whistling as he gazed up at the towering structure which was the last word in modern architectural accomplishment. But he led her into the brilliantly lighted lobby with the assurance of the veteran traveller, who doesn't hesitate to ask where he doesn't understand. Julia, whom he had taken with him, lest

he might wish to refer to her, listened to his crisp questions and comments.

"Did a Mrs. Charlton Braithwaite and maid register here today?—Yes, thank you. Is she still here?—Checked out at six, did she?" His watch was in his hand, his glance met Julia's. "Did she leave any forwarding address? No?—Well, then, can you refer me to anybody here who might know where she went?—You can't. Would you mind thinking that over just a minute, please? The matter's important."

His eyes sharply regarded the young woman behind the desk, who was smiling politely and shaking her head.

"Well, then," he began again, "can you or anybody else find out for me which bell boys waited on her, and which porter took her luggage? The house detective—would he be likely to help me?"

And so on. Julia Heath found her own excitement mounting as she listened and watched. Dr. Gaysworthy was the most determined person she had ever seen. Confronted by a politely indifferent management which had neither the time nor wish to bother with him, he persisted in his effort to gain some clue as to the movements of this guest who had remained but three hours in the house.

"She's frequently here, you know," he said to

the house detective, when that individual had been summoned. "Somebody must recall her and may have some information to give."

"You can put the police on her track," suggested the detective, "if it's that sort of case."

"It's not. We'll find her ourselves. We know she had suite 752. You yourself took no note of the two—Mrs. Braithwaite and maid—who had those quarters?"

"It's a rather big place for me and my assistants to cover in such detail," said the man nonchalantly. "We don't attempt to watch any but suspicious cases. If this woman was of the type that frequent the house, and behaved like it, she'd pass unnoticed. You'd better call in some outside help, if you want to get anywhere."

"Not yet." And Dr. Gaysworthy walked away from him, over to another window. After some minutes more of unintermitting inquiries he succeeded in obtaining a bit of information that made his eyes light. It came from a curly-headed young bell boy who had been unobtrusively keeping near him, his ears alert. The boy came up to him as he was turning away from the window, still baffled in his search.

"Beg pardon, sir, but were you looking for a lady and her maid that were in 752 this afternoon?"

Dan turned quickly, his hand in his pocket.

"Yes. Did you wait on them?"

"Yes, sir. I noticed them special, because the lady was kind of nervous and queer. And I took a man up to the parlour of her suite. I heard her say, 'Did you get it?' I think he's an agent for a steamship line, because he comes here often to see parties sailing."

Dan's generous tip slid into the boy's hand. "Can that make you remember any more, son? Don't make up anything, you know—I want facts."

"Yes, sir. I don't know anything more myself, but Number 33 might. He took 'em out to their taxi when they left—I was busy. I'll get him soon's he comes down. He just went up with a party."

The boy slipped away through the crowded lobby. Dan turned eagerly to Julia.

"Had Mrs. Braithwaite spoken of wanting to go abroad this summer?"

"Yes, several times. She told me she wished to go, as they usually did, but Mr. Braithwaite wouldn't, this year, for some reason. She wouldn't go without him—she doesn't like to travel alone. You don't think——"

"It's a possibility, though it doesn't seem probable she could get accommodations—to say nothing of a passport—at three hours notice, at

this crowded time of crossing. Still, money will do nearly anything, and influence the rest, if she knows how to get it. We're on their trail now, I think."

He bought an evening paper and scanned the sailing dates of the various lines and companies, slipping his finger rapidly down the columns. By the time the boy had returned with his fellow servant Dan had made up his mind.

"All right, son. Do *you* remember anything about the two ladies you put in a taxi from 752? Where did they tell the driver to go?"

"I think it was Pier 56, North River, sir," the second boy replied. He was a thin-faced, eager-eyed chap, who might have been suspected of lying for a fee or telling the truth without it—whichever way one interpreted his pleasant smile. "That's the Cunard Line. Quite a lot of parties left tonight to sail on that ship—it's her first voyage."

The fee went into the boy's pocket with Dan's thanks for his information. Then Julia was left for another half hour while Dr. Gaysworthy of Korea kept the wires busy from a booth. An interested girl operator at her desk near by put each of his calls through as fast as possible. When he finally came back to Julia, a cool assurance was in his voice.

"I can't make absolutely certain," he said, "because a last minute booking doesn't always get on the office list till the ship has sailed. They can't get in touch with the agent who came here, but it seems reasonably certain that Mrs. Braithwaite could have secured passage. Quite a large party of people who were sailing together gave up their staterooms at four o'clock on account of the sudden death of one of them. Anyhow, the clue's one to follow. The ship sails at midnight. Now—shall we have a bit of supper? I confess I'm hungry!"

"Yes—so am I. But, Dr. Gaysworthy—I must make sure of a room for the night, somewhere—and I can't afford to stay here, even if I could get in, which I probably couldn't."

"I've seen to that. There's a room waiting for you at a small and very comfortable hotel where I used to go—and one for Mrs. Braithwaite, if we find her. As for me—I'm all fixed up too, somewhere else. Now—shall we go and have the thickest kind of planked steak with all the trimmings? No use to hurry. And I've ordered the steak—it ought to be pretty nearly ready by now."

He took her out upon the street, and round the corner into a side street—and presently in at an unpretentious door to upstairs rooms well occupied.

"I thought it would still be here—and it is," he said, with satisfaction, looking about the dingy, comfortable room. "A place like this keeps on existing because its patrons won't let it stop. All right—and thank you for trusting me."

His smile at her was a gorgeous one, and she returned it with one which repaid him for his care of her. If she thought a broiling hot beefsteak on a melting July night a trifle ill chosen, she was not long in changing her opinion. She had had time for but a hasty lunch, and it was now nearly nine o'clock. Her companion had had no lunch at all and was obviously famished. When they finished there were but a few odds and ends on the silver platter—and Dr. Gaysworthy had not eaten the steak alone. He had enjoyed watching Beatty Braithwaite's secretary set her white teeth into its red richness.

"I never tasted anything quite so good!"

"Neither did I. Honest Injun—aren't you pretty nearly glad she ran away?"

Her laugh was delicious. "Yes—if we find her."

"We will." His tone was confident. "And even if we don't, nothing can make me wish we'd stayed at home."

XVIII

A YELLOW taxicab again, and a hurried, jerky trip through the brightly lighted, thronged streets to the region of piers, where outgoing and incoming liners lay waiting, their hulls washed by a dark and nearly stagnant stream. Down the long, dingy building of the Cunard line, past the customs, up the gangway. It lacked less than an hour of the ship's sailing time when the pair of seekers had made certain that "Mrs. C. S. Braithwaite and maid" were actually on board.

It was a quarter of twelve when four people went down the gangway again, observed by many curious eyes. Few travellers are in their berths when a great new ship sails, no matter what hour of the night witnesses her slow withdrawal from her pier. This party consisted of a sturdy looking man with a grave face; a smartly dressed woman with a set pallor and trembling lips, who was supported by the man's arm and clung to it; a younger woman at whom the men lounging near the gangway looked with interest; and a scared young person whose black eyes were glittering with excitement.

There had been an extraordinary and decidedly tumultuous half hour in Beatty's stateroom, but the thing had been accomplished. It was easy to recognize, though she had tried to carry off the situation as a reasonable one, that Beatty Braithwaite was frightened at her own daring, and that only the drug which she had taken was stimulating her to hold out for twenty distracted minutes against the representations of Julia Heath—for Dr. Gaysworthy had sent her in first—that she should abandon her project and return to her home. Meanwhile, she had been rapidly prepared for leaving by Julia's hands and those of Estelle under Julia's direction. Beatty could only protest that she had to get away, that she couldn't stand staying, that nobody understood or loved her, her husband least of all. When her voice rose frantically, Dan entered the room, and the decision and command in his tone kept down the rising storm of hysteria which would make the transition from ship to street a conspicuous one.

"You're not fit to travel, you know, Mrs. Braithwaite," he said to her. "You'd be repenting this before you were halfway across. We're not going to let you make a false move, that's all. Stop—be quiet—don't let yourself go!" The words held that quiet, edged force with which the strong will controls the weak one. "We're

doing only what your husband will thank us for —and you, too—— Quiet!—Don't make it necessary for me to call help—for I shall, you know, if I have to. No matter what you do, you're not going to sail on this ship, Mrs. Braithwaite."

She did know it, and she submitted, her half-drugged brain still able to tell her that she had done a wild thing, and that in obedience lay rescue from trouble and embarrassment. She kept up a pretence of anger and remonstrance long after she felt actual though dazed relief that she was in other hands than her own. This, somehow, her rescuers recognized. It made their task easier than they had feared.

So, presently, Beatty Braithwaite lay in bed, in a small and comfortable room at a hotel so unpretentious compared with its great neighbour round the corner which she had left a few hours before that she would have been bitterly humiliated had she recognized the fact. But she was by now beyond caring what happened to her, and lay in a heavy sleep, attended by a nurse whom Dan had summoned from a hospital.

"She really needs a nurse to-night," Dan said to Julia. "This French idiot knows nothing, and I won't have you lose the few hours' rest before morning. I'd have taken her back to her chosen hotel if I could have managed it, but they'd

have been suspicious of her there now as likely to make things noisy or unpleasant. She's really better off in this quiet place."

"Of course she is," Julia agreed. "You've managed it all perfectly. I realize now that I could never have done it alone, if I'd even been able to find her, which I doubt."

"That's nice of you. I feel like a cat in a strange garret, after eight years' absence from this country. It's been rather fun to see if I could remember how to pull the wires. They seem to be about the same wires, though—maybe a few more of them.—Now, I must let you get some rest. Don't worry about our patient—she's good for several hours' sleep. I'm on the next street—here's the telephone number and my room if you should want me before I get around in the morning. Be sure to call me if you have any trouble with her."

"Thank you, I will. Good-night, Dr. Gaysworthy."

He had a distinct impression, for not the first time that night, of taking leave of a friend. Julia Heath had been all that he could have asked as a companion on this adventure: quiet, quick to comprehend, ready to act, delightful to look at and to listen to. He had not failed to note how other eyes followed her, though she was

dressed in the extreme of well-chosen simplicity, and her voice was always so low that it could never draw attention even from those near by. Yet a certain look of spirit, even of a desirable audacity, was not absent; he could guess that, among people whom she knew well, with whom she was under no restraint of time and place and contact, she could be deliciously gay. He found himself wishing eagerly that he might see her under such conditions, instead of, as always thus far in his acquaintance with her, under those of responsibility, anxiety, and presumable fatigue. Yet, even now, as he bade her good-night, she didn't look wearied; there was about her, he could discern, much vitality, much energy, and an abounding interest in life. This attracted him, for like all men of his profession, though his work was among the sick, his tastes were all for the well.

So he said good-night and went away with his mind full of pictures of one exquisite person—a fine dark eyebrow, thick lashes on a curving cheek, a mouth which—well, it wasn't easily forgotten. He told himself determinedly that he was a fool to come back to America for one concentrated purpose and then to let such distractions get him almost instantly by the neck. He promised himself sternly that, this wild journey once over, he would plunge again into

the business of clinics, which he had come to profit by, and would remember that he had long ago determined that celibacy was the only state for a man who had elected to live his life in a foreign country, in the service of mankind. Why, he was well on toward forty, said Dr. Daniel Gaysworthy to himself, much too old to be caring whether a woman's hair was black or yellow, or what happened to be the elusive colour of her eyes.

And then, electing to go to sleep and forget everything disturbing, he lay awake for hours, remembering.

XIX

UP IN Massachusetts, in the morning, Michael Paige received a telegram for Mr. Scarborough Braithwaite.

"Read it, read it," commanded the old man uneasily, and Michael opened it and read.

FOUND PATIENT WILL LOOK AFTER HER TILL ABLE TO BRING HER PROBABLY TO-NIGHT NO HARM DONE

GAYSWORTHY

Michael took the message up to the Court, where Ann was staying, solely in charge. Lena had been sent down to the South gate to look after Uncle Scar and Mr. Paige, while Ann instructed the new Swedish nurse, Hilma, in her duties, and began her own experimental lessons with little Alfred. This had seemed the best arrangement to make, for Mrs. Montague was hurriedly packing to go away, declaring that she couldn't and wouldn't be even the nominal head of such a house. The servants, she said, were on the verge of revolt; the housekeeper, Mrs. Rouse, couldn't manage them; and the but-

ler, Simms, was a thief—she had all but positive evidence of his taking money from her purse. She didn't want to be there when Charlton Braithwaite returned—he and she didn't get on well together. And as for receiving Beatty when she should be brought back—Mrs. Montague's own nerves were in much too shattered a condition. She was sure Mrs. Paige was just the person to assume these cares—Beatty's old and dear friend. . . .

Ann found herself positively detesting Mrs. Montague, long before that lady's luggage was brought down by a stiff-backed William and a cross-faced Rogers, and she was put into the motor to be taken to the station.

"My dear," said Mrs. Montague plaintively, taking her leave, "you've no idea—and of course I shall *not* tell you—what life in this house has been. I didn't realize for a long time what was the matter with dear Beatty, and of course, until I knew, I had the greatest sympathy for her, and felt it my duty to stay and see her through this summer of house parties. But now that I do know the frightful truth, I do feel I must consider myself first. It's a dreadful house, my dear Mrs. Paige—a dreadful house—and the presence of that strange child makes it absolutely uncanny. I ought to warn you . . ."

But she found no encouragement in Ann's

chilly look to warn her of anything. In fact, she got no chance, for Ann's gesture indicated that Rogers was standing like a ramrod in the doorway, waiting to see the guest to the motor. So she went away, and Ann was glad to see her go.

Mrs. Michael Paige turned back to her own responsibilities in this deserted home, wondering just how acceptable her suggestions would be to the servants with whom she had for a time to deal. Everywhere she saw evidences of neglect: faded flowers in great vases, a litter of cigarette stubs and ashes beneath a table on the porch, a breakfast tray still upon the floor outside Mrs. Montague's late bedroom. The interior of the house had never impressed her favourably; its furnishings and decorations were too elaborate; its colourings too florid; most serious criticism of all, there was an absence of any indication that its inmates cared for that for which Michael and Ann Paige cared supremely—the literature of the world. Except for one or two formal bookcases in the so-called library, filled with never-used expensive "sets" of standard works, not a book was to be seen anywhere. Even on the porch tables there were only various sporting magazines and newspapers, all in disorder; there was nothing of any quality. Before now Ann had noted such signs, so significant to the eye, but they hadn't stood

out quite as they did this morning, when she found herself temporarily in charge of the great place. And the master of that place was across the continent, and its mistress had run away, under the influence of a mad impulse, leaving her little son, without a thought, to hirelings and a friend who was not a friend. What a situation! Ann thought warmly of the house at the South gate—to her mind it was infinitely to be preferred to this, which was no real home at all.

She had an interview with Mrs. Rouse, the housekeeper, and found that person as full of complaints and disloyalty as Mrs. Montague. But Ann was not without experience in contacts like these; she had learned long ago how to get on with people of any rank. She had also learned that the same rules that govern all successful human relations govern those between employer and employee in the household. So presently a soothed and placated housekeeper was telling an outraged butler about to leave that it wouldn't do to desert Mrs. Paige in this crisis.

The cigarette stubs were swept up, the withered flowers replaced with great fresh clusters arranged with considerable skill, and everywhere was restored the look of order and care without which elegance is but trumpery. Ann herself made sure that Beatty's own room was

in readiness for a presumable invalid, and inviting withal. Somehow, she was sorrier than ever before for Beatty. It must take much wretchedness and unendurable depression of spirit, she thought, to make a woman run away from all that this one had left without a word of warning.

A second telegram from Dan apprised his sister of hour and train, and William was sent to meet the party arriving in the late evening of the second day after Beatty's departure. Ann and Uncle Scar were both upon the West porch to await the return. Mr. Scarborough Braithwaite had decided that the Court needed him, if he didn't need the Court, and had removed himself to his old quarters there.

"I hate to leave you, Michael," he had said warmly. "It's been pretty nice for me, staying down here in the old house, living my boyhood over again, and getting to know you and Ann. I'd like to stay right on—I'd like to adopt you two. But I suppose I have a certain influence up there; things are bound to be a little steadier with the old man around. The servants seem to like me—they don't cut up quite so many high jinks when I'm there. And I don't think Beatty dares to go quite so far. Charl's very good to me, and seems to want me to be comfortable. Anyway, I guess I'd better be on hand when she comes home. She can't fool me any more now,

you know. I admit I think I must have been pretty blind not to recognize what it was that made her so highty-tighty one day and so down in the dumps the next. But now I do know maybe I can be of some use to her. She's Charlton's wife, when all's said and done, and we don't want any scandal."

"We hate to let you go," Michael had said. "But I think you're right, Mr. Braithwaite, as to your having influence there. You couldn't fail to have that wherever you were. It's the difference between the positive character and the negative. Two negatives may make an affirmative in speech—they don't in life."

"No—they make a vacuum," declared Uncle Scar, chuckling.

So he and Ann were there to receive Beatty when she was helped out of her motor by Ann's brother and walked feebly up the steps. Her appearance shocked Ann; she was not prepared for such ravages as she saw upon Beatty's face, in spite of Estelle's skilful attentions. No cosmetics can wholly conceal wanness and misery, and only an actress can put life into a voice whose natural note is one of discontent. Young as she still was, Beatty's condition appeared to Ann, herself blooming with health and life, almost like that of a middle-aged and worn-out woman. Uncle Scar, in his seventies, leaning

upon his blackthorn stick, his ruddy face fresh, his eye bright, seemed more vigorous of body, and a veritable athlete in mind, compared with this young woman in the thirties who had done her best to begin to destroy both body and brain. There could be no doubt that she had gone farther upon that dangerous road than anyone associated with her had realized.

"Oh, Ann!" Beatty wept upon Ann's shoulder, and Ann's heart ached for her at the same time that she found it hard not to despise her. "I'm ill—ill—and nobody knows how to make me well, except Dr. Gaysworthy. Please make him stay. He's going to have me put to bed, and then he'll leave me—I know he will. Make him stay!"

Over Beatty's shoulder Ann's eyes met her brother's, a question in her own.

"I'm going to stay till we get things straightened out," he answered soberly. "But bed's the place, and the only place. See that she gets there at once, will you? I'm going to telephone into town for a nurse. We couldn't bring the one we had in New York."

So the household settled down again, but under far different conditions than had been those of the summer thus far. Instead of innumerable parties, cars always rolling up and down the driveways bringing or conveying away guests,

caterers' and florists' wagons in early evening, and the strains of orchestra music in the later hours, there was a strange quiet everywhere. No gay-hued frocks appeared upon the terrace, no white flannels on the tennis courts. Shouts and laughter, always high and often forced but not always gay, no longer resounded about the place.

Instead, a sturdy old man leaning on a blackthorn stick paced up and down the big porch, thrusting entangling rugs out of the way. There was often to be seen a slender little boy, sometimes with a competent-looking Swedish nurse, sometimes with Mrs. Paige, who took him everywhere about the grounds while she talked to him, and won his difficult friendship, and taught him things that nobody had even tried to teach him before. And there was Julia Heath, spending hours in replying to invitations for Mrs. Braithwaite, always in the negative; answering notes of inquiry as to her "illness"; writing notes of thanks for flowers and fruit from private gardens and conservatories; sending letters of skilfully evasive explanation; cancelling previous invitations to people to Braithwaite Court—a tedious round.

A week after the return of the house's mistress, its master arrived from the West. There had been no way in which to inform him of the new circumstances. He walked in upon the un-

wonted and to him extraordinary stillness of his house, with an expression of wonder.

"Mrs. Braithwaite's not well, sir," Simms informed him at the door. "Mrs. Montague's gone away, Miss Heath's in charge. Mrs. Paige is looking after Master Alfred—she's giving him lessons, sir."

Simms took much satisfaction in this last announcement. The servants, from the butler down, considered it "a shame, the way the child's treated." They didn't blame the father of the child nearly as much as they did his mother; they shrewdly comprehended that the master of this house was more or less under the thumb of its arrogant mistress, though it ought not to be so. Mrs. Braithwaite didn't want Master Alfred about—therefore he wasn't about—that was all there was to it. At the same time, though they liked Charlton Braithwaite, they wished he had been more of a man—"like Dr. Gaysworthy," who, in spite of his curt orders, had won each maid and man who had come into contact with him.

Charlton went up to his own room. From there, presently, he made his way to that of his wife, knocked, was admitted by Estelle—and stood looking at the ravaged face upon the pillow.

XX

"DR. GAYSWORTHY, there are two subjects I want to talk over with you. My wife's condition—and what you think of my son."

"All right, Mr. Braithwaite. We'll have it all out, and the sooner the better."

A long conference followed. Daniel Gaysworthy felt much sorrier than he had expected, as his discerning eyes watched the man before him.

"I suppose I've been blind," Charlton Braithwaite said, passing his white, plump hand over his smooth hair with a gesture of bafflement, "but I've never suspected this drug complication for a moment. I've known, of course, that my wife used stimulants, as we all do, when she didn't feel up to her social duties. I've sometimes warned her I thought she was overdoing it. But it's never entered my mind that she was taking anything else. I don't know when she began, nor how she came to begin. It must have gone rather far, though, Doctor."

"Yes, she's become pretty well accustomed to certain opiates," Dan said frankly. "She's well

started on the habit, and it's going to be a hard pull to get her out of it. You'll have to take hold yourself, Mr. Braithwaite. She's going to need you more than she will any doctor or nurse. If she can have your will to brace hers—if you can make her feel she's got to do the trick, fight the fight, to keep your respect—that will be the strongest incentive that can be given her."

Charlton's expression became still more perturbed. He got up and began to walk the floor. He didn't know how to tell this blunt chap just what the situation was; didn't want to tell him. Yet he must in some way make him understand that getting his own will behind Beatty's—making her want to overcome her own weakness for his sake—looked to her husband just the most hopeless thing in the world. He thought he knew only too well how little she cared to keep either his respect or his affection. To go to her and say, "Dearest, you must do this for me!" would be to make her laugh in his face. "What do you care what I do?" would be likely enough her rejoinder. And—to be honest about it—except for appearances, just how much did he care?

"Can't something be given her to take away her—appetite—if you call it that—for these drugs?" Charlton inquired, evading Dr. Gays-

worthy's suggestion. "I thought there were such treatments for such cases."

Dan shook his head. "Nothing's of any use, without the co-operation of the patient. The will—the will—that's what must be aroused. She's got to make her own fight for it, while the rest of us practically stand and look on. Except her husband. He ought to be the one to give her the real incentive she needs."

His look was searching. Charlton straightened and tried to meet it.

"I'll do my best, Doctor—I will, of course, if I can learn how to do it. And now, about the boy."

He had little Alfred brought in. Ann Paige came with him. He had hold of her hand, and kept hold, though his father held out his own hand. Charlton was staring at his son, with something strange in his eyes as they studied the small face.

"He looks a little stronger," he said. "And—a little brighter."

Charlton sat down and held out his hand. "Come here, son," he said.

Alfred hung back, but Ann, smiling down at him, walked across the floor with him and gently put his hand into his father's.

"Do you like Mrs. Paige?" Charlton asked.

Alfred refused to answer, but he looked around at Ann.

"What are you and she doing this morning?"

No reply. Charlton frowned.

"This is what I'm accustomed to, from him," he said sadly. "I don't think we've exchanged three words in his lifetime."

"You're going to exchange a good many in the future," said Daniel Gaysworthy. "That is," he added gravely, "if you really want to, Mr. Braithwaite."

Charlton turned toward him quickly, a flush overspreading his face. "You may be sure of that, Doctor," he said, with emphasis. "I've been given to understand the case was hopeless."

"So far from hopeless, in my opinion, that I'd be willing to stake all I own—which isn't much to be sure, but represents my conviction—that there's nothing subnormal there at all. It can hardly even be called retarded development. The name I should give it——" He paused. "But I won't tell you that. . . . Ann, take the little chap away. This is enough for him, just now."

"Why not? I may as well know," Charlton insisted, when the door had closed on the two figures, Alfred again clinging to Ann's hand.

"You wouldn't like it—or me."

"Go ahead."

"All right. It will sound brutal to you, but I should say it's a plain case of—neglect."

"Dr. Gaysworthy!" Charlton's plump fists clenched—the colour poured over his face again. Even his neck grew scarlet.

"You'll have to forgive me." Dan's tone was more gentle. "Now that I see you, I don't think it was wholly your fault; in fact, I'm sure it wasn't. You were misled. But—you shouldn't have allowed yourself to be misled, you know. You should have got at the facts for yourself."

"I thought I had. We've had every specialist——"

"Did you talk things over with them yourself?"

Charlton considered. "My wife usually saw them," he admitted. "The whole thing was extremely painful to me. I was told in the beginning that the child was subnormal. I'll have to admit that, once hearing it, I avoided contact with him. Probably I shouldn't have done that."

"You certainly shouldn't. It was—" the word "cowardly" was on Dan's lips, but the look of suffering on Charlton's face made him change it to another—"it was—unfortunate. You should have gone to the bottom of the thing, yourself. But—it's not too late. The way the case has opened up, in the fortnight he has been in my

sister's charge, shows that improvement, steady and sure, can be confidently expected. The mere change in nurses—from a hard and cruel hireling to a woman who really cares for children—Hilma does that, you know—or don't you know?—makes a lot of difference. Up to now the child's nurses seem to have been picked for their ability to keep him from disturbing other people, with the effect of any amount of disturbance to his own sensitive nervous system. Now he has somebody who—well, to put it rather brutally again—mothers him, in a really wise way for a mere uneducated Swede. I've watched Hilma with him; she's gentle yet quite firm. She doesn't let him kick her shins, and—better yet—her effect upon him is that he doesn't want to."

The talk went on. When it was ended Charlton held out his hand. "I've never met a doctor just like you," he said. "You certainly inspire confidence. You've roused considerable hope in me that I may have a son after all. But—you're not a specialist in nervous diseases, nor in child psychology, I understand. I'm taking it for granted you know what you're talking about."

Dan's smile was appreciative. "That's true. It's a good deal to expect of you. But perhaps you've lived long enough to learn that it doesn't always take a master mechanic to run a motor;

sometimes other men pick up expert knowledge in lines that run alongside their own. I've nothing against specialists in any line, least of all medicine and surgery. I can't be one myself—I have to do too many different sorts of jobs. But it's easy to get a narrow view—see one's own specialty in every case. I may be wrong in this one, of course. You can call back one of the men you've had before and get his fresh opinion. But I'll admit I'd rather like to be present when he examines the case."

"You shall be—if I call him. I think I'll trust the boy in your hands, for the present, if you'll keep him."

"Trust him in my sister's, then," Dan stipulated. "She's a pretty clever woman, and she's got Alfred's liking—which is certainly a long step forward."

It was left at that. The days that followed contained new and strange experiences for Charlton Braithwaite.

XXI

FROM Julia Heath to her brother, Dale Heath:

"I wish you could see Mr. Braithwaite trying to do his duty by his wife, and something more than his duty by his son. It's pathetic, from my point of view. I'm beginning to believe in the man more than I've ever been able. I don't know what goes on when he seems to be devoting himself to his wife—I imagine it's a perfunctory devotion—I hardly see how it could be otherwise. She's very queer. On some days she's all nervous energy; on others she will hardly move or speak. He's really nice to her; gets her out and makes her walk about the gardens with him; tries to talk with her. She's frightfully petulant, often hysterical, always exacting. But he's certainly very patient, and I think she more or less realizes that he wants to help her.

"But it's in the boy that he's interested. Every day when Mrs. Paige is here for his lessons Alfred's father is hovering about. I can see him watching them, listening to them, following them in an unobtrusive way. It's so interesting

to see his face light up when Alfred makes one of his infrequent childish speeches. The little chap doesn't talk very much, yet, but when he does pipe up it's apt to be a quite surprisingly intelligent observation."

As Charlton looked and listened to little Alfred, behaving as a boy might be expected to behave—engaged in making forts and villages out of his sand pile, getting excited when an excavation caved in, shouting with glee when he achieved the construction of a particularly high tower—Alfred's father was pondering many things in his mind. How had it all happened?

It was impossible not to recall certain occurrences which shed a brighter and brighter light on the whole puzzle. How could he have been so dull to them? Beatty hadn't wanted a child at all; had been rebellious and unmanageable over it from beginning to end; had even threatened to go to some illegal practitioner; had been kept from it only by her husband's alarmed representations of the danger which would result to her own life. When the boy had been born she hadn't wanted to see him. Afterward had followed a long series of consultations with those supposed specialists. Charlton found himself wondering whether they really were men of po-

sition and ability. He himself, as he had admitted to Dan, once informed that the child was not up to the standard of mental development, had sheered away from him; had left everything pertaining to him in the hands of his mother; had been willing to forget him. So it had gone on, until he had come to the point of hardly being aware that he had a son at all. Had that chap Gaysworthy been only just when he had used the incriminating word "neglect"?

But now—now that Charlton had suddenly become aware of the tremendous fact that it had all been a mistake—all but a crime—he discovered in himself new and unexpected reactions. He was the father of a real boy, a delicate, highly strung boy, to be sure; one whom he was afraid to touch, but who had in him the usual possibilities and potentialities. It made all the difference. Charlton was interested to the degree of absorption.

So, all at once, he was both happier and unhappier than he had been before. Unhappier because of Beatty; happier because of Alfred. Between the two he was in a state of amazement. He seemed to himself to be more alive than he had been; alive to both pain and joy. For joy was not unknown to him—a new, delicious joy—which came to him on the day when

Alfred, at sight of him, shyly lifted something he had in his hand to show him. When the child turned again to his sand pile, Charlton found that his own eyes were full of unwonted tears. It was, incredibly, the first time in his life that, assuming great surprise and glee, he had said: "I see, son. Well, well—that's pretty nice, isn't it?" after the everyday fashion of fathers who have little boys to cherish and adore.

It was on this same day, a few hours after, that Beatty cried out at him, moving her head pettishly from side to side: "Good God, I wish you wouldn't watch me so. Why don't you put me behind the bars and be done with it? Can't I put my hand to my mouth without your being suspicious of me?"

And when he said, as gently as he could, that he was only anxious to have her get back her health and be able to enjoy life, she burst into tears and all but shrieked: "Who cares for life? I don't. I'd rather be dead than have everybody sneaking round to spy on me."

At which he had known that he wasn't getting much of anywhere in his effort to back her in the fight she was supposed to be making. He couldn't make her care to fight. Was it because he couldn't make himself care? So he was miser-

able again—until he again caught sight of Alfred. At least here was something to live for. Alfred's father knew it now, if Alfred's mother didn't.

XXII

"I SUPPOSE you couldn't explain to a fellow how the machine works."

Michael Paige looked up at his brother-in-law, who was standing in the doorway of the study, his hands in his pockets, eyeing him. The writer sat before his typewriter, but he wasn't writing now, he was laying together a sheaf of sheets and putting a clip upon them. The day's work was done, it was quite evident. How it had been done was what interested Dan Gaysworthy.

Michael came out of his absorption, heaving a long sigh. He ran his fingers through his hair and then smoothed it down again.

"I suppose you don't mean the typewriter," he said.

"No, I don't. I mean the combination of grey matter and red and white cells, and so forth, which is your brain. How do you get it to function, hours on end, while you sit in front of a lot of little black-and-white keys?"

"That's what often puzzles me," admitted Michael. "Quite frequently I don't get it to function."

"Then what do you do?"

"Go out for a tramp."

"All by yourself?"

"I should say so. How else would one be able to think things out?"

"Walk toward the town or the other way?" persisted Dan.

"Good heavens, man—the other way," Michael replied, with something of an edge on his tone. He particularly disliked being quizzed about his methods of work.

Dan's eyebrows drew together. "I shouldn't think you'd find anything there."

"Shouldn't you? I find quiet, aloofness, fresh air. If I went toward town presently I'd meet somebody. He'd walk along with me, talking endlessly. By the time I got rid of him I'd meet another."

"Yes—I can see the disadvantage of that. But —I've been here a month now, and I haven't seen you court the society of a human being except Ann, and Uncle Scar, and—when you couldn't help yourself—myself. Tell me, old man—are you always such a hermit? How do you get sufficient contact with what's going on to start the ideas germinating?"

"Why, look here!" Michael swung about in his chair. "You think I'm a regular stick-in-the-mud, don't you? Because I'm not hustling about the country all the time, like Dan Gaysworthy,

I don't know what's going on! Why, I read everything I can lay my hands on—half the day —hours after you're asleep."

"I'll bet you do. In fact, I know you do. You're a gentleman and a scholar, and I'm a mere mechanic—a plumber. It would bother me a heap to write a monograph on anything, even in my own line. At the same time, as I look upon your white brow—a mere figure of speech, for it's fairly well tanned, I admit—I find myself wondering how you can get any stream of energy and virility into your work, all hedged off as you seem to be from hitting elbows with your fellow men. Mind you, I know you do it, but the how of it is what interests me. Object to this inquisition?"

"I do, as a matter of fact. And if you don't mind my saying so, I can't help taking notes on you at this very moment!"

Dan laughed. "That's just it. I know you are. But I'm blamed if I see what other person you've had the chance to take notes on in the last twenty-four hours."

"Well—" Michael paused, smiled to himself, sobered again, and went on. "There's supposed to be a thing called a creative imagination, which works on its own lines. I confess I haven't a very good one, but it does work, at times. And I do, occasionally, meet men and women. Night be-

fore last I was in town for an extremely interesting and idea-provoking publishers', editors', and writers' meeting. Edgerton presided. Do you happen to know Fuller Edgerton?"

"Never heard of him. Sorry."

"Your loss, Dan. His, too, of course. Well, he's about the most brilliant editor of a great magazine on the list. Usually at such meetings he only presides, with occasional comments hurled into the discussions—the whole thing is very informal. That night they wheedled him into making a regular speech, though he hadn't intended to. Everything got electric with interest. I never heard anything like it—and I'll wager you never did, either. It was worth—why, I can't tell you what it was worth to me as stimulation to whatever brains I may possess. I haven't got over it yet."

"I begin to see. And yet I don't see. I like to hear a big surgeon read a paper on something he's done or worked out. But hearing him read isn't a patch on seeing him operate. One incision is worth a dozen paragraphs. I'd rather listen to your man Edgerton bawl out the office boy than hear him speechify on the most learned subject in the category."

"Better yet, you'd like to hear his remarks as he came out of ether, after going under your knife, of course."

"Well, yes. Or after he was fully out. By the way, how often do you see this man Braithwaite, at whose door you live?"

"Not often."

"Not particularly congenial, you two?"

"I'm very greatly indebted to Charl for the use of this house. I can't suppose I could repay him by forcing my society upon him for a part of every day."

"I'm not so sure." Dan eyed Michael scrutinizingly. "I have an idea he'd mighty well like to know you if he thought you'd care for it. He stands in awe of you, you know."

"What!" Michael's short laugh was ironic.

"Yes, but he does." Dan came in and sat down on the edge of Michael's desk, his long legs crossed before him, his arms folded. "He does. Why shouldn't he? Why shouldn't a fat and puffy frog, who's never done anything except sit on a lily pad and watch the minnows swim by, be in awe of a beaver whom he watches working —constructing—really making something? You bet he is. And would like to know the beaver. But he thinks the beaver doesn't want to know him. Superiority of mind over matter, inferiority complex, and all that, you know. The frog feels it. He couldn't put two stones together to help him to his lily pad without getting his feet wet."

"Why should he want to? He likes his feet wet. He's web-footed."

"Yes, and he thinks you think his brain is web-footed too. Probably you do. But let me tell you the man's worth knowing. If he'd had half a chance—if he'd had to make some of his money instead of inheriting it—he'd have amounted to something. As it is, he's unhappy because he realizes he's useless."

"You think he realizes that?"

"Know it. I've had some talks with him, and the chap showed me something of what was inside of him. Then he spoke of you. 'I suppose a man who writes the sort of thing Paige does is practically independent of Fate,' he said one day. 'He can do what those lines from an old poem we used to hear analyzed in the classroom say of such a man's mind—he can "sit in the centre and enjoy bright day." ' I tell you, the words sounded wistful from the lips of one of the richest younger men in this county."

Michael looked amazed. "I can't imagine Charl's quoting a thing like that," he said.

"If you knew him you could imagine it, because you'd hear him do it."

"What are you getting at?" Michael rose up and began to stroll up and down the floor of the study. It was raining heavily outside; the rain drove in under the porch roof. It was no day

for walks, but a good one for talks now that his work was off his mind. He was now decidedly interested in what Dan was saying. "Are you bringing me a letter of introduction to my benefactor?"

"I'd like to have it result that way. I'm not going to tell you all he said, but I gathered that he likes you, admires you, and envies you. But he thinks you've no use for his type of fool. Yes, he used that phrase of himself. You see he can't get over his having tacitly agreed, since his boy was born, to having him shelved. He blames himself unmercifully for that. He says if he'd been half a man he'd have looked after the whole matter himself and trusted nobody. He thinks—is sure—you and Ann—he admires her too, you know—can't help despising him for it."

"I suppose we have," Michael admitted. "But I didn't suppose we'd let it show. I've hardly seen him since the child was rescued."

"That's the point. That's why he imagines this thing. See here, I don't know that you make copy out of your friends' misfortunes, but I shouldn't think you could help learning a lot about human nature by studying them in various situations. For every reason, I should say, you can't afford to neglect Braithwaite just now. Why, I've seldom been more interested in seeing what a child

can do for a man than I am right now. It's astonishing. But—he needs still more than that. A friend—the real thing in friends."

Michael stood still, looking out of the window at the driving rain. It was dashing against the pane so heavily it gave the effect of hitting him in the face—somewhat as Dan had done.

"I suppose," he said slowly, "you think I'm pretty selfish to care more for my work than I do for my neighbours. I'll admit there's a lot of the recluse in me. If it weren't for Ann I'd undoubtedly be stuck in my shell most of the time. She drags me out, now and then, for the good of my soul. But when all's said and done, you know, Dan, I have to do the thing in my own way. You think I don't get enough human contact. I don't know how you get along without books and all that's stored up in them. After all, neither of us could do the other's job."

"We sure couldn't." Dan's agreement with this was hearty. "And I've no business to be saying this sort of thing to you, because—I may as well confess I've never read a thing of yours and don't know how close to real life you've been able to come. Maybe it's closer than I think. See here—I'll make a bargain with you. If you'll go and look up Braithwaite, I'll read one of your books."

This brought a laugh from Michael. "I've

written only one, Dan. And that one's not been much of a success. You wouldn't like it at all."

"No matter. I'll wade through it."

"Wade through what?" A gay, interrogative voice came into the discussion, over Dan's shoulder—or under it, for Ann lacked many inches of her brother's height.

"Jolly Rogers! Now I *am* in for it.—Your husband's book, Madam. I'm offering to read it."

"Why, Dan Gaysworthy! I sent you a copy at your hospital—Korea. Do you mean to tell me you never read it?"

"I always meant to—never found the time," Dan confessed, with appropriate looks of guilt.

"And now you're offering to 'wade through it.' Of all the brutal frankness!"

"Yes, but in return he's going to wade through a little task I've set him. Then we're going to compare notes. See here, Ann—you keep out of this. I've never had much of a chance to know Michael, you're so eternally in the foreground. You go back in the wings and leave him the centre of the stage."

"The centre of the stage! With *you* present?"

With this shot Ann disappeared, but came back in a minute with the brown cloth-bound book of modest size which bore Michael Paige's name upon its back, under the title *Values*.

"There!" she said, putting it in his hand. "You really ought to simply crawl away somewhere and read it from start to finish without stopping to eat or sleep. I assure you nobody has to wade through anything Michael Paige writes. You'll find yourself marching rapidly through this book—or else your brain is duller, when it comes to literature, than I think it."

Dan looked at Michael. Together they burst into a roar of laughter. Ann joined them. Then Dan, assuming the meekest expression of which his resolute face was capable, took the book and departed from the room with a gait which was the nearest approach to the prescribed crawl that long and sturdy legs could be expected to assume. Then Michael took up his hat.

"I'm going to see Charl," he announced to Ann.

"To see Charl!" she repeated in amazement. "In this rain? What for?"

"Good day to see him—he'll be sure to be in. Haven't seen much of him. He probably thinks I'm an ungrateful chap."

"You mean you're just going to *call* on him?"

"Just going to call on him."

"But it's pouring."

"It is. I have a raincoat, rubbers, and an umbrella. They'll undoubtedly keep me reasonably dry."

Not being one of the wives of whom husbands have virtually to ask permission before they make any move whatever, Ann at this point desisted from further comment. She watched Michael stride away in the rain, and then went off about her own affairs. Passing the open door of Dan's room, a few minutes later, she observed him sprawled upon his bed, his knees crossed in the air, deep in the brown book.

"They're going to 'compare notes,' Dan said," she reminded herself, pondering the matter. "I wonder about what. Well, if I'm not too inquisitive they'll tell me themselves. Whatever it is, I hope it makes them know each other better. So far they're about as well acquainted as two dogs in kennels across the yard from each other!"

XXIII

IT was nine o'clock that evening, with the rain still coming down with unabated persistency, that Dan descended the stairs from his room to the dining room. Here he knew he should find Michael and Ann, beside the fire they would be sure to kindle, on a wet night, even though the windows should all be left wide open. He found them precisely as he had anticipated. The small dining table was pushed to one side of the room. Michael was sitting tipped back in an old Windsor chair at one side of the fireplace, pipe in mouth, hands clasped behind his head. Ann, on the floor before the fire, was popping corn.

"My word!—And this is August!"

Ann looked up. "Why not? It's a chilly, damp night. Don't you like lots of hot butter on it? Or have you forgotten how it tastes? I'll wager you haven't had any since you were a boy."

"I haven't. Yummy! It smells wonderful. I'm all for it."

Dan sat down, placing his chair well back from the blaze. It was a small fire, as befitted a summer night. There was no other light in the

room except that from two candles on top of the high chimneypiece.

"Well?" he began without preliminaries—Dan wasn't much on preliminaries to anything. He was eyeing Michael, the outlines of whose face were dim in the shadowy room. "Did you have a pleasant call?"

"How do you know I went?"

"Saw you piking off, in the rain, as I settled myself with your book. Each of us going at something we'd agreed to do, to get it over. I hope yours turned out as unexpectedly interesting as mine did."

Ann looked around and up at her brother with a flash of pleasure in her eyes, her lips opening. But she instantly shut them again and applied herself to her corn-popping.

"Idiot!" she apostrophized herself silently. "Don't you dare say a word. Efface yourself now, if you ever did."

"Mine turned out very interesting indeed," Michael said. He grasped his pipe by the bowl, drew deeply, emitted a heavy cloud of smoke, then closed his lips again tightly over the stem. Dan regarded him with a shrewd smile.

"The way you do that," Dan observed, "looks as if you added to yourself: 'And that's all I'm going to say about it.' I hope it isn't. Any reason why you shouldn't tell us about that visit?"

"None whatever. I'd rather like to remember it without talking about it, but I suppose I owe it to you to tell you, since you sent me."

"You bet you do," agreed Dan. "Because I've got something to tell you in return, and the two things may go together. And don't forget I'm that man's friend, too."

"I know you are. Well—there's not much to tell." Michael sent two more slowly blown puffs of smoke drifting toward the low ceiling before he spoke again, while Dan waited, his arms clasping his crossed knees. "I found Charl alone in the billiard room, practising shots with apparently about as much interest as—you sat down to read my book."

"That's not as good a simile as you think it is," Dan remarked. "I was deeply curious about your book—and you. Go on."

"He asked if I wanted to take a cue. I told him I was the world's worst. He knew that already, and took me away to a big room he calls the library. There may be perhaps five hundred books in it. Mostly sets, in costly bindings. Never opened."

"Not that many. Three hundred and fifty was my estimate. Proceed."

"We sat down, and he offered me something to drink and smoke. I refused the highball and

pulled out my own pipe to fill with his priceless tobacco. He lighted a cigarette—the first one of a full package which he consumed without intermission. He said the room was cheerless—which it surely was. I asked him why he didn't have a fire. 'That's a thought,' he said, and got up and gave the order. Simms came in, looking amazed, and built the fire. The room changed its appearance the moment the flames began to shoot. We drew up our chairs."

Michael paused, for a full minute. Dan didn't comment, this time. Ann opened her popper and spilled a fountain of plump white kernels into a waiting pan, put it one side, refilled her popper, and went on with her task, without turning her head.

"We sat there the best part of an hour and a half," Michael went on, about the time Ann had made up her mind he never intended to speak again. "We talked a little—off and on—about various quite unimportant things. I'd never even suspected Charl was the sort of fellow with whom one could sit by a fire and talk only a part of the time. Perhaps he wouldn't have been so silent if he hadn't been so low. I could see that all over him. But—he wasn't so low when I came away as when I went in. And he didn't seem to want me to go, even then."

Michael paused again. He was staring at the floor, and he let the hand that held the pipe bowl rest on his knee, as if he had forgotten to smoke. Finally, he finished the brief tale, if tale so uneventful a recital could be called.

"As I was leaving he picked up a book—which I hadn't noticed on the table, because it was mostly covered with newspapers. It looked like my book, but I didn't believe it till he said, in a queer sort of embarrassed way: 'I suppose you wouldn't imagine it, but I've read that through three times. I don't understand it all, but what I do understand I like—immensely.' I said: 'I appreciate that very much, Charl.' Then I came away. You see—" he raised his pipe, saw that it was dead, reached for a match, relighted it, and then added, with a shake of the head—"there really wasn't anything to tell. What happened was—just what can't be told."

Ann got up, brought a lump of butter in a tin, melted it over the fire, and poured it over her heaped panful of popped corn. Then with a big spoon she ladled it into three deep blue and white bowls and handed them round.

"That's great!" murmured Dan. He might have meant the popcorn. They knew he didn't. The explosive Gaysworthys were as silent for a space as the non-explosive Paige. At last Dan, putting down his empty dish, inquired gently:

"Glad you went?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm glad I read your book."

Michael made no reply to that. Instead he got up and mended the fire, which was rapidly falling to embers. Outside the rain had ceased —a chill wind was blowing in which made the warmth acceptable, August though it was.

"I didn't expect to like it," Dan went on. "I like you, you know—but I thought the book would be a bit—well, say, colourless to a fellow like me. It did seem that way, at first. And then I began to wake up to it. I realized you did know something about life, after all, even though you viewed it from a different standpoint than mine. You saw a lot of little things that I'd been blind to. It was as if—I don't know how to put it—as if we stood somewhere together looking at a great picture, and I took in only the bold outlines, and you called my attention to certain points I'd missed. Points that really made the significance of the big outlines. Colour, and form, and all that. I guess I'm not very good at this sort of analysis, but that's the effect it had on me. And I—well, Ann——" Suddenly he turned to her, as if he could say what he wanted to say better to her than directly to Michael. Michael stood with his back to him, anyway, with his arm on the chimneypiece, looking down

into the fire.—"I took off my hat to him. He's not off on a peak in Darien after all, he's down here in our midst. Only he's so quiet about it we think he doesn't notice all that's going on. He does."

"Yes. He does," said Ann, very distinctly. Her eyes were glowing.

Michael knocked the ashes of his pipe into the fire. It was some time before he turned around. When he did he only said, "Much obliged, Dan. But you were right about getting me to go to see Charl. And I'm going again—soon."

Dan nodded. "It's luck it rained to-night," he said. He got up and strolled over to the window, his hands in his pockets, peered out into the darkness and strolled back. He came up to Ann and put one arm about her shoulder. Then he held out his hand to Michael.

"Shake, brother," he said.

Rather gravely they shook hands, as if the moment held significance for them both. Then Dan stooped and kissed his sister.

" 'Night, Sis," he said. "I'm going to call it a day and turn in. These books that start you thinking—well, it's been a busy day of that, and I'm tired. Not used to it, you know. 'Night, Michael."

" 'Night, old man."

Ann went about the room, putting it in order.

Michael was again standing by the chimney-piece, gazing down into the now dying fire. Ann glanced at him several times, thinking, as she had thought a thousand times before, how fine were the outlines of his head and his down-bent, quarter profile. Nobody knew except herself, she was sure, just what Michael was. Dan had only begun to make his acquaintance. She understood just what it was about Michael Paige which made Charlton Braithwaite like to sit beside him for an hour, over the fire, although little had been said.

XXIV

"BEATTY, listen to me. The child isn't abnormal—subnormal—whatever those doctors called it. The case is clear. We've simply neglected him—shoved him off on other people—and he's nearly been ruined by it. Now—it's up to us."

His wife, lying back upon her pillow—she never was up and dressed until afternoon, these days—regarded him with a look of horror. He looked steadily back at her.

"Oh-h!" she breathed, and put her handkerchief to her mouth. "How can you?—How *can* you?—When I'm—like this!" And she turned her head away from him.

"How can I—what? Isn't it good news—to know the boy is like other children?"

"But he isn't! He isn't! All those specialists have said so. You're being fooled."

"I'm not being fooled. I can see for myself. He's far below what he ought to be, physically, as yet, of course. And equally of course he can't be up to the average mentally, for his years, because he's had no training, till now. . . . Wait!

—I'm wrong there—he's had every kind of training—of the worst sort. But—he has a normal brain—his mind's all right. If I'm not mistaken, he'll catch up with the average child in a year or so. The terrible truth is, Beatty, that—we've been smothering the boy—denying him everything he ought to have. If you could see him with Mrs. Paige——"

Beatty's cry interrupted him. "I don't want to see him with Ann Paige. I wish to heaven I'd never let her come near him!"

"What!" Charlton's look was one of horror.

"I mean—" she caught herself up— "I don't trust her. She doesn't know. She'll overtax his brain—make an idiot of him. It's bad enough as it is. I couldn't bear that."

"Beatty! That's absurd—you know it is. She's doing everything for him."

"Yes—and blaming me. Blaming me to you—making you think I haven't been a mother to him—"

"Of course she's doing nothing of the sort." Charlton's tone was stern. "She's done nothing except make a magnificent beginning of teaching him the things he needs to know—first of all to control himself. She's actually teaching him that, Beatty. And you ought to be glad—grateful—as I am."

"I tell you, you're fooled." Her voice rose hysterically. "Between you you'll make him worse. All the specialists——"

"Damn the specialists! I've had enough of 'em."

He longed to tell he that he didn't believe any man of real reputation had ever seen the boy; that he distrusted her management of the thing absolutely; that he couldn't get away from the suspicion that her hatred of having a child at all had tempted her into playing a game to keep Alfred out of her way. Yet he couldn't say these things to a woman who looked as his wife looked. She herself wasn't normal now, with all her drug-taking; she was more or less of a nervous wreck. One couldn't speak out to a nervous wreck—the brutal truth might have serious consequences.

Beatty was sobbing. Charlton forced himself to reach out and take her hand, but she pulled it away.

"Oh, as if I didn't have *enough* to bear!" she moaned. "Go away and leave me. Go back—to Ann Paige. You're crazy about her—that's the real thing at the—b-bottom of this."

"Beatty—you sha'n't say that. And you know better. You know I want my boy—*and I'm going to have him.*"

It was all he could say just then. Something rose up unexpectedly in his throat and prevented further speech. Abruptly he went out of the room—and out of the house.

XXV

"DAN, want to dance to-night?"

"Me?—Dance?—Where?"

Dan had just come in from one of the week's absences at surgical clinics which were his meat and drink. He looked up from unpacking his bag, at Ann standing in his doorway. "My word!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, I know," agreed Ann demurely. The "wisp" of coral and silver Mrs. Geoffrey Dupont had sent her was having its chance, at last. She looked as her brother had never seen her. "Beatty's giving a terrific lawn party to-night, with every frill she could think of. And there's a dancing pavilion that's enough to make a bear light on his feet, so even you ought to be able to get about. You used to dance, Danny. And Julia Heath's going to get a lot of attention, I promise you. When Beatty makes her play up and dress up she doesn't look a bit like anybody's social secretary."

"Giving a lawn party!—That dope fiend, in the shape she's in!" Dan's tone was exasperated.

"The moment you went, last week, she began

to plan it. She's had everybody jumping for six days. Charlton tried to prevent her—he couldn't. Nobody could. I've stopped caring much whether she goes to pieces afterward or not. I'm going to dance to-night with Michael, on that floor, to the music of that orchestra, if everybody covertly laughs at our last decade's style. Come along, Dan—we're going in ten minutes. The thing is in full swing right now. Didn't you hear the gorgeous music as you came in?"

"Noticed there was some kind of rowdy-dow on up there, but didn't suppose it concerned me. Thinking about what I'd just seen, anyway. That man Gower, Ann—on my word I never saw such lightning work. He——"

"Put on white trousers, if you've got any clean. And hurry up."

White trousers, in the outfit of a man from Korea, were his most plentiful specialty. Dan was twenty minutes in taking his bath, shaving, and dressing, but when he presented himself Michael persuaded the impatient Ann that that was record time for the beautiful result before their eyes.

Lights of all colours gleamed through the trees, as the three walked up toward the great house. Ann was right—there was no concomitant element of the modern lawn fête which had been left out of Beatty's plans. Diversions of all

sorts were present, in gay coloured marquees—some of them well to one side of the central group. Dan realized, glancing to right and left, that he could have his fortune told; could play bridge—for high stakes; could moisten a dry throat; could do nearly anything or see nearly anything that Vanity Fair has to offer. But with Ann and Michael he held his course toward the dancing pavilion. One suggestion in Ann's invitation had taken hold.

He didn't see Julia for some time. The three stood with a few others at the side of the large floor, watching the moving throng. Dan had never seen anything like the riot of colour, motion, and sound that presented itself to his unaccustomed eyes and ears. His companions, though by now not unused to Beatty Braithwaite's entertaining, admitted this to be her most violent effort to accomplish the bizarre. She herself was to be seen now and then upon the dancing floor, a high-coloured, fantastically gowned hostess, with excited eyes burning in her strained-looking face. Usually she was being carelessly steered about on her excessively high heels by some bored young man who was obviously doing his brief duty turn with her, while over his shoulder he watched some slim young thing with scarlet lips and flaming frock who laughed alluringly back at him as she vibrated past.

Dan was gazing at Beatty with a frown of disapproval, not entirely professional and concerned with her health, when Ann pinched his arm.

"There's Julia. Doesn't she look like some lovely silvery bird among a flock of parrakeets? She *makes* a man dance the way she wants him to—like a gentleman. Oh, I do think she's the most exquisite thing!"

Dan's hurriedly roving eye descried Beatty's secretary at last. Julia was in white and silver —the only girl upon the floor who hadn't chosen some startling colour in which to outshine all rivals. Ann loved colour herself, she liked to see the gorgeous flame shades, the wonderful green-blues and jade greens, the oranges and purples, of the modern dancer, with all their flashing or feathery accessories. Ann didn't really admire the gowns that left backs bare to the waist—she didn't care for spinal columns. But she wasn't in a critical mood to-night, and her eyes were sparkling with the undeniable enchantment of the scene, the music, the whole clever phantasmagoria of gaiety that was before her. None the less did her taste and her affection approve and delight in the outstanding charm of the approaching dark-haired creature in gleaming white with touches of silver—the whole effect quite as sophisticated as any in all the crowd. As

to Julia's dancing, restrained though it was, and therefore—as Ann had said—forcing her partner's to match it, the pair who now came circling directly before the Paiges and Dan stood out from the rest with a distinguished sort of difference not to be mistaken.

"She *is* exquisite," Michael agreed, while Ann's brother said nothing. But Dan looked as long as the two figures were in sight, and watched with eyes that lingered upon nobody else till the pair came round again.

"You must both dance with her," Ann decreed. "Michael, let's try this one. We can dance as Julia does—that's easy enough, and near enough the old steps we know. I simply can't sit still any longer."

They moved off. Michael said afterward that he felt like a St. Bernard capering ponderously among a pack of terrier puppies, and as conspicuous as that. But Ann kept him going, with a firm hand preventing him from getting into disaster, and herself feeling like a girl again, as she looked. Dan stood still, waiting for the white and silver frock, the ivory shoulders bared just daringly enough, the smooth, dark head, the whole delicate air of distinction, which to his mind made all the girls and women on the floor look like a rainbow of puppets. Of course, in

spite of his prejudiced opinion, there actually were many gay young beauties present worth looking at. He hardly saw them, and did them no justice whatever.

When Julia had gone by him three times, the second time recognizing him with a smile which made his sober face break into an answering reflection, he had passed the stage of mere observation. He watched for the end of the number, and was somehow through the crowd and at her elbow the instant she stopped. Two other men were there as well, but she turned toward Dan. With the art of the girl who knows how to choose without offending she gave him the preference, so that, with a bow of recognizing thanks toward two smiling though disappointed faces which he would never know again, he bore her away.

"I can't dance for sour apples," he confessed. "Never could, though I used to tread on toes with the rest. Don't dare try it on this race course. Could you bear it to walk away with me? It looks great off there, among the trees and lights."

"I'd love to," she answered with a little sigh of relief. "I had to begin dancing with the earliest comers, to please Mrs. Braithwaite, and I'm quite ready for a rest."

She gave him a light silvery scarf to place about her lovely shoulders, and they strolled slowly away from the pavilion, the music following them. Dan wasn't used to music like that —it made him feel irresponsible. He wasn't used to feeling irresponsible, and had to admit to himself that he might as well take several heady drinks as stay within range of those strange cadences. Queer! An hour ago he had been full to bursting with the enthusiastic memory of certain operations he had seen in a far-famed clinic which he would give his right arm—if a surgeon's right arm could be spared—to be able to duplicate. He had been confident he could duplicate them, and eager for the chance. Now—he could think of nothing in the world but white and silver—the very same ascetic colours of the surgery itself, for a fact. But with what a difference!

"Keep hold of yourself, old man," Dr. Gaysworthy silently warned the boy Dan who seemed suddenly to be walking in his shoes.

"I'm so glad you came back in time for this," said Julia Heath, moving with him under a soft blaze of rose and amber lights. "We didn't think Mrs. Braithwaite was equal to it, but she would do it, and it seemed best not to oppose her too much."

"She did it when my back was turned. Nice prescription for a nervous wreck. Well, never mind her. Do you like this sort of thing?"

"Some of it, very much. I'm still young enough for that, and I've danced all my life—only in very different places. We used to have charming parties in my old home town in Virginia. But here—I try to take only what I care for and ignore the rest. It's all I can do, being only a social secretary, you know. I do love to dance—with the right partners."

"My sister says you're able to make any partner into the right one. I don't know how you do it, but I'm thankful you do."

She smiled. "That's a high compliment. I'm afraid I couldn't make *any* partner into the right one, so I don't try, but take only those I'm fairly sure of. Mr. Braithwaite helps about that."

"He does? How?"

"Plays watchdog, rather. I'm sometimes very grateful to him. As the evening goes on, and when the worst comes to the worst, he seems to be always there to carry me off himself, in his autocratic way. They can't dispute their host, you know—or don't. And he seems never to take too much of what he offers others plentifully. I wish he didn't let it flow quite so freely,

but he's done it all his life and knows no other way."

"Suppose not. Glad he keeps his head enough to look after you." Dan's brows drew together again, as he noted, in a passing trio of gay young dogs, distinct signs of their needing already to be kept in hand by somebody. He looked down at the satin-smooth head beside him, and quite unconsciously clenched his fists for an instant. He didn't want her to go back to dance with anybody in *that* condition, and he wondered what other condition any of these youths would be in after midnight. Since she liked so much to dance he wondered if he himself possibly could manage the more simple of these steps. It was all of eight years since he had danced—had thought he never would again.

They walked and talked for a half-hour while the time flew for Dan. Then Julia said reluctantly: "I'm sorry, Dr. Gaysworthy, but Mrs. Braithwaite will notice if I'm gone too long. She depends on me, at such affairs, to look after things."

Dan was silent as they approached the pavilion again. Suddenly he said rather gruffly: "Would you risk a turn or two with me? I suppose it'll be awful for you, but I'd like to try it. I don't think we'd actually fall down!"

Julia laughed. "Why, of course. I'd be much

honored to be taken out on that floor by the distinguished surgeon from the Orient. I was afraid you weren't going to ask me."

"I was afraid I wasn't, either, but Ann says I've all the nerve in the world. I need it, right now. It's the sight of the crowd there that spurs me on. I've seen several crashes already. But I think I can keep my feet off those little silver slippers."

"You couldn't possibly step on them—try it!"

Five minutes later, Ann Paige, returning to Michael after several rounds with Charlton Braithwaite, who was the most accomplished partner she had ever met, shrieked in her husband's ear above the wail of the saxophones and the mad beat of the drums:

"Dan's dancing with Julia! See them?"

Michael nodded. "He's doing very much better than I did with Beatty," he boomed back in her ear. "They both look joyous. I never should have believed Dan could get away with it."

"Julia's clever—and Southern. She could dance with an elephant—and I must admit that my dear brother isn't unlike one just now."

It was as Dan and Julia came to a stop, in an interval of the number, that Mrs. Braithwaite, appearing terribly fagged, her face ghastly under her rouge, caught Dan's arm.

"Take me out of this, Doctor," she commanded, huskily. "Don't make a scene of it. Begin to dance with me, this next, and then get me away." Her glance at Julia said without words, "You can take care of yourself. Don't come after us."

"Just a minute, Mrs. Braithwaite." Dan looked about him, but he didn't have to wait to find another partner for Julia—one was there, flushed of face, bloodshot of eye, smiling fatuously. Forgetting everything else, Dan was about to interfere and send him off, but Julia murmured quickly: "I'm all right, Dr. Gaysworthy, thank you." At the same moment Dan caught Charlton Braithwaite's capable glance, from not far away, silently reassuring him. So, unwillingly, as the music began again, Dan put his arm about the swaying form of his hostess, and after half a round swung her out of the mass of dancers and away from the pavilion. It seemed he couldn't be allowed to get out of his profession for more than twenty minutes, after all—hang the luck!

XXVI

IT was hours later, with the dawn just showing faintly, when he walked slowly back toward the South gate. His activities had been many during the night. He had seen Mrs. Braithwaite into the hands of the maid Estelle, had felt her pulse and listened to her heartbeat, and had grimly forbidden her to get out of bed for the next forty-eight hours.

"I had to give this party, Dan Gaysworthy," she had cried out rebelliously. "Everything's been just too deadly. I *have* to have excitement —I can't live without it."

"No—I see. Well, I'm indebted to you for showing me how the thing is done, these days. I imagine there'll be still more excitement before all your guests go home. Too bad you're going to miss it, Mrs. Braithwaite."

She stared up at him as he stood beside her bed. His arms were folded across his sturdy chest, his cool eyes looked past her out of the open window, through which came the sounds of the music, the voices and high laughter of a gay group just below, all more or less barbaric.

"Are you really so terribly disapproving?" she jeered. "You seemed to be having a ripping time yourself when I took you away from my paragon of a secretary. I suppose *she* suits your ideas of Puritanism. I call her Miss Every-Hair-in-Place! All she needed to-night was a pink sash and her finger in her mouth!"

He made no answer. Beckoning Estelle, he gave her orders, then went quietly out and downstairs. There was no blinking his indebtedness to Mrs. Braithwaite, in spite of his disdain for certain features of her entertaining. She had given him something he had never expected to have—the surging consciousness of her nearness and dearness felt by a man who holds in his arms, for the first time, if only for a brief space, all he could ever have dreamed of possessing.

But he didn't dance with Julia Heath again, nor have the chance. She herself danced no more that night. A group of girls and young men, all of them either riotous or helpless under the influence of the ceaselessly flowing beverages served in one of the marquees, were the object of Julia's attentions and efforts. She got two of the girls into the house and put them to bed. She sent several others home in their own cars. She enlisted the help of Dan, Michael, and Charlton himself in getting rid of the three

worst offenders of the night, the most reckless and dangerous of the revellers.

"You go sh-shut that g-girl up s-somewheres," one of these gurgled into Dan's face, pointing a wavering finger at Julia. "No use havin' a p-party with s-saints keepin' th' k-keys."

Dan lifted the limp slim figure and put it into the waiting car, closing the door upon it with a slam. He turned to Charlton, who had laid an angry hand upon the boy's arm as he made this speech.

"Why not cut off the flow, Braithwaite? Think it pays to keep it going down irresponsible necks like that?"

"I know you're not used to our ways, Doctor," Charlton said, as the two walked away. His own breath was strong with alcohol, but he showed no other sign of having partaken of his own hospitality. "It's impossible to entertain as the Puritans did—if they did. Not in these days. I do my best to keep things decent, but there are always a few who overdo it, and they belong to families we can't offend by cutting them off our lists. Sorry you had to be in on the unpleasant end of things to-night. When I saw you dancing with Miss Heath I hoped you were having a pretty good time."

Dan looked around into the other's worried

face, and said to himself that it was impossible to help liking Charlton, even though he belonged to another world than that which Dan himself thought the only world worth belonging to. He spoke warmly.

"I was," he said. "And this whole scene's a wonder to me, for beauty. I never saw anything like it. I promise you I'll remember that part of it. But we've got to keep your wife from any more explosions like this. Next time she wants to put the match to the gunpowder, you've got to take it away from her. Her heart's weak, from constant doping, and she can't stand the strain."

Charlton nodded. "I understand, and next time I'll be firmer. It's just a bit—difficult to——"

"I know. All right. You just be master here —she'll respect you all the more."

Dan stayed the night out. It was worth staying to watch Julia Heath, he thought. Amazing, the lovely dignity she maintained, along with what seemed to him an irresistible charm. Other men felt it too, and paid it tribute, according to their ideas. Dan fancied the white and silver of her attire grew whiter and more silvery as the hours wore on, the "every-hair-in-place" of Mrs. Braithwaite's contemptuous characterization more true of her, in a far from "saint"-like way. Her well-bred, gracious manner carried no

hint of her being either shocked or indignant, though Dan was confident she must have been both, many times. He had never seen girls and women behave as these behaved; times had changed with a vengeance since he went away to Korea, eight years ago and after the World War. The amazing clothes—or lack of them—on the women, their freedom of speech and manner; the wild laughter, the boisterous ways and deeds—and with it all the seductive strains of the music, the whole setting of the scene——"It might be anywhere in the underworld," thought Dan, "instead of out in the heaven-pure air of a night like this. Of course, I'm an old fogey, from their point of view—but I'll be hanged if they know the way to get what there is out of life. They don't know the first line in the guidebook to happiness, though they think they know the last."

When he said good-night to Julia, standing like a young queen in the hostess's place, her smile was still cool and sweet, though her eyes had seen as clearly as his own when a girl who might have been an artist's model, a dressmaker's mannequin, or a popular actress—she held so many of the favours of both nature and art in her beautiful hands—wavered up to Julia, laughing into her face as she made her parting speech, in a jibing, delicious, half-maudlin voice:

"Rippin' old night of it, Miss What's Your Name—ought to know but don't. Thanks for lookin' after Ethel—she needed it. We all need it—but—you're missin' something, you know. Must be sort of chilly up there where you are, eh, what?"

Then she had fallen back, still laughing, into the arms of the young man who pressed close behind her, looking up at him as he laughed back—a pair of young moderns to whom nothing was left to discover in the world they lived in, except that they had missed the best there is in youth, its on-tiptoe expectancy of each new delight. These two, it seemed to Dan, were already old.

As he strolled slowly back to the house at the South gate, where Michael and Ann had long since betaken themselves—both feeling like fish very much out of water, and caring for no wine—Dan was thinking to himself:

"They call her a prude, I suppose. Well, if she's a prude, give me prudery forever. I'd put it another way. She can go through fire and come out without the smell of it on her garments, bless her! For me, I don't like the smell of fire—on a woman."

XXVII

ONE October morning Michael and Dan were having an exciting discussion upon the porch, when a respectful voice interrupted them. A tall figure in livery stood behind them —William, the chauffeur from the Court.

"I beg pardon, sir. Mr. Braithwaite wants to know if Dr. Gaysworthy would come up to the house at once?"

Dan rose without much show of alacrity. "Mrs. Braithwaite?"

"No, sir, it's the little boy—Master Alfred. He was taken ill very suddenly, sir. Mr. Braithwaite and Mrs. Paige and Miss Heath are very alarmed about him. I have the car here, to get you there quick."

This message galvanized Dan into concern. To be sure the car was there; it had gone by a minute before, turned around, and was facing toward the Court.

"As scared as that?" he ejaculated. "All right —let me get—no, it's in my pocket. Sorry, Michael——"

He dashed off after William, who, his mes-

sage delivered, had wasted no time in getting back to his seat at the wheel. Dan swung onto the running board and stood there, waving his hand back at Michael as he was borne swiftly away.

It was two hours afterward that Mr. Scarborough Braithwaite came walking and stumping his blackthorn stick agitatedly down from the big house to find his friend Michael Paige. Halfway there he met Michael himself, coming up. Hearing nothing further, and neither Dan nor Ann having returned, Michael had set off to learn for himself what had happened. He was startled at the appearance of the old man.

"The boy's gone," said Uncle Scar, with lips that shook.

"Gone!" Michael didn't understand—or wouldn't.

"Dead."

"What!"

Uncle Scar nodded; he couldn't speak.

Michael thrust his arm through the old man's, turning about with him toward the South gate. "I can't believe it," he murmured. "Oh, God—I'm sorry!"

They were at the porch before Mr. Braithwaite could pull himself together. Evidently he had met a heavy shock. Michael got him into a chair and gave him a glass of water. Finally he

spoke, with an effort, but with a violence that told of the pent-up feeling.

"It was that damned dope!"

"Why—what——"

"He got hold of something that looked pretty —in a glass—pink—and drank it."

"Where?"

"In his mother's room."

"Why—I thought he never——"

"Charl had him in there. He was trying to get Beatty interested in the boy. They were arguing —she didn't want him there. Charl thought she ought to see more of her son. They didn't notice —till it was too late. They found the glass empty."

"And Dan couldn't——"

"He worked like a savage. If the boy'd been older and stronger, he might have been saved. His little heart——"

Michael's hand was on the old man's shoulder, as it shook beneath his touch. This to him was a new Uncle Scar. He had thought of him as tough as a hickory knot, but clearly age had left its undermining touch upon him. Besides, Michael remembered suddenly, Uncle Scar had lost his own son by a tragic end. This would leave the depleted family without an heir. Oh, but it was too bad! It was incredibly too bad! At the moment Michael was full of an actual

hatred for Beatrice Braithwaite, because of whom this tragedy had come. Tragedy—the house up there was full of it! And worse than the death of the dead was the life of the living.

It was all over, very simply and quickly. Ann Paige and Julia Heath saw to that, for Beatty Braithwaite would not lift her head from her pillow until the hour came that had been set. Then, leaning on her husband's arm, she came haltingly downstairs to the short and beautiful service which had been arranged. She sat with eyes down and hands nervously chafing each other until it was concluded. She would not look at her little son, lying among the exquisite exotic blooms that Charlton had ordered lavishly, not content with the garden flowers Ann had preferred, and had herself gathered.

There were but a few present—Beatty's friends, elaborately dressed, observant, letting nothing escape their curious eyes. The servants all came in—Hilma, Alfred's nurse, with reddened eyes; Lena and William together, Simms and Mrs. Rouse and the rest—a stiff, awed group. Afterward the Braithwaites, with Michael and Ann Paige, Julia Heath and Dan Gaysworthy, accompanied the little form to his last resting place—hardly more lonely, Ann thought, looking on with pitiful eyes and an

aching heart, than his crib had been since he was born.

When they returned to the house Beatty seemed in a collapsed condition, and was carried to her room and put to bed again. Just how she felt about it all it was hard to tell. She had not wanted her son; her wish at last was granted —she had in actuality no son. Over for her was the necessity of even pretending to care for him. She was free now, certainly.

Charlton stood looking down at her as she lay there, her head turned away. He had done his best to behave as a husband should behave toward the mother of his dead child. He had been very gentle, very considerate in his manner; he had treated her as if she were suffering, as he was. He would have given half he owned, at this moment, if she had shown him, even so late, that she cared because the pair of them were childless.

Her eyes closed, she lay quiet. While he watched her she sank away into slumber. Almost immediately this sleep became deep, profound, as was evidenced by her heavy breathing. Was it exhaustion that produced it? By this time Charlton was wiser. Bitterly he realized that, in spite of all her keepers, Beatty had somehow in her own hands the power to put herself away from consciousness whenever she so wished. Re-

garding her as she lay a fierce envy of her seized him. After all, why endure torment when so easily could be procured oblivion for hours on end, and apathy toward hard circumstance all the time? He had borne enough, and borne it all alone—or so it seemed.

XXVIII

HE went out of the room and downstairs. He was feeling in his pocket for certain keys. He passed Mr. Scarborough Braithwaite in the wide hall without seeing him, and went on to a certain inner room opening from the coat room, the key to which he kept himself, never surrendering it even to a servant. Glancing about him and seeing no one, he let himself into this place, dark and cool, with a certain peculiar odour upon the close air. He obtained that for which he had come, and closing and locking the doors, inner and outer, came forth again and slipped upstairs. He went into his own room and closed the door.

Within a very few minutes, and before he had done more than make ready for the carrying out of his purpose, a knock fell upon his door. He made no answer, but sat looking angrily at it. When the servant entered he would send him packing with a brusque word. But though after a second unanswered knock the door opened, he spoke no such word, for the figure that came in was that of an erect old man with a gleam in

his blue eyes and determination on his tightly closed lips. Leaning on his blackthorn stick, but seemingly hardly to need it, Uncle Scar slowly advanced. He stood still before the younger man, and Charlton rose reluctantly to meet him, understanding why he had come.

Scarborough Braithwaite looked his nephew in the eyes—his miserably unhappy eyes. Then he looked at the small table beside the armchair Charlton had left, with its setting forth, more than ample for hours to come. His gaze came back to Charlton's face.

"Charl," he said, and for an instant his lips were unsteady, now that he had opened them. He controlled them, and spoke firmly: "You can't do that, you know. I'm not going to let you. It's no way out—it's the way in—to hell."

"I'm already in," Charlton answered, from the depths of his unendurable depression. "Don't try to stop me, Uncle Scar. I can't bear—any more of—this day. You can't ask me to."

"I do ask you to. I've been through worse days than this is to you—though God knows this is bad enough. I didn't do it with the help of old Scotch—or whatever you've got there. I know all you want to get away from. But—you must remember your wife, Charl. You can't desert her to-day."

"My wife"—Charlton's lip curled into what

was very like contempt—"has taken a different road to the same place I'm headed for. She's asleep. She'll not waken for hours."

The old man looked comprehendingly at him, then came closer, and put his hand on his nephew's arm. "That's rough," he admitted. "But you had to expect that. Charl, you feel hard toward her for getting out of her trouble so easily. Don't you think you'll despise yourself to-morrow for being as weak as she is?"

"I—Uncle Scar—" Charlton drew away from the gripping hand—"won't you go away and leave me? I know you mean to be kind, but I'm best alone—I swear I am. There's a limit, and I've reached it. To-morrow'll be another day, and I'll try to meet it—somehow. But for to-day——"

"To-day"—the old man spoke with the swift sternness of which he was capable; it was the voice of a younger man in its quality of authority—"you'll make a beast of yourself to forget—what shouldn't be forgotten, Charl, no matter how hard it is to remember it. Men don't get drunk the day their sons are laid away—not unless they're cowards. I can't see another Braithwaite a coward—not one of my blood. And I won't—not without a fight."

The two stood looking at each other, and the younger man realized through all his misery

that the old man spoke out of a strength of character and a depth of experience that gave him a right to be listened to. What was his own sorrow over little Alfred compared with the lifelong grief of a father who had seen his only and grown son drink himself to death? Small wonder that Scarborough Braithwaite felt as he did.

Charlton closed his eyes. He couldn't endure that piercing gaze a moment longer, and yet it seemed impossible to give up his purpose. Then he opened his eyes, stinging with hot tears, walked away to the window and stood looking out. . . . Up the driveway a figure was coming with a swift stride—it was that of Daniel Gaysworthy. Even at a distance Charlton could get the sense of that eager personality—it was like a cool, reviving breeze blowing in upon his hot brow. Suddenly he knew it was unthinkable that he should be willing to let Dan find him as Uncle Scar had found him—ready for an orgy of forgetfulness. No question of it—he must keep the respect of them both, at any price. He came back to the table, picked up the tall bottle as yet unopened, and handed it to Mr. Braithwaite.

"All right," he said, in his weary voice. "We won't have a fight. If you meet Gaysworthy downstairs will you send him up? Perhaps he could show me a way to stop thinking. That's all I want."

When Mr. Scarborough Braithwaite met Dr. Gaysworthy in the hall, the old man was carrying his left hand behind him.

"I think Charl will be glad to see you, Dan," said Uncle Scar. "He's had a hard day, and he needs sleep. Suppose you can give it to him without——"

Dan nodded. "I came to take him for a long walk," he said. "He's been a trump all day—I'm as proud of him as you are. Now, if I can just tire his muscles out, to match his brain, he'll sleep like a child."

Uncle Scar smiled wanly. "You're the best doctor I ever knew," he said. "Yes, I'm proud of Charl, too."

XXIX

"MICHAEL, my dear, you haven't read me a word of your work for weeks. Did you know it? What's the reason?"

Michael got up from his desk. "Ann, my dear," he retorted, "you haven't asked me to read a word of my work to you for weeks. Did you know that? What's the reason?"

Ann gazed at him. "I haven't? But you usually offer, don't you?"

"Never. I'm much too proud to offer. But hitherto you've kept track of me, have known whenever I was full to bursting. Now you go about with your head full of your own ideas and pay no attention to mine. What I want to know is whether becoming a salaried person has made this unfortunate change? Have I lost my sanest critic?"

Ann laughed. "Of course I never was any sort of critic, but I did like to hear you when you were modestly pleased with something you'd done. What *are* you doing now, anyhow, Mikey?"

"Ann!"

"Of course I ought to know," she confessed shamefacedly. "Won't you forgive me and read it to me?"

Michael brought the clipped sheets out upon the porch. Ann hunted out some mending—rather long neglected. The pair settled themselves, as of old, to the consideration of their chief means of support—Michael's work, in the rough. It really was amazing, come to think of it as Ann now did, how completely her new occupations seemed to have left Michael in the lurch.

He read aloud to her for the space of an hour, while she listened with growing intentness. She had had to force her mind to concentration at first, but presently she found herself being unexpectedly challenged by the three short sketches and his handling of them. They were simple enough things, both the subjects and the handling—or so it seemed. But little by little Ann began to realize that there was something new in Michael's technique. Or was it in his viewpoint? He had gone on from one sketch to another without pausing, and when he finished and looked up at her he found her face kindled into genuine enthusiasm and admiration, of a decidedly changed quality from anything of the sort he could remember her according him before. For a long minute she was silent. Then——

"Why, Michael Paige!" she exclaimed, and still sat staring at him.

"Well?"

"Why—why—they're all corking! Perfectly corking! I didn't know——" She stopped and bit her lip. "It's somehow—different from anything I've ever known you to do!"

"Can you tell me just how? I'd like to know."

She had indeed been a keen critic, though always a generous one, as well. She had never failed to praise his work when she possibly could. That work had been very uneven—Michael knew that well. Plenty of it had gone into the wastebasket, first and last, because Ann had said unfalteringly that it belonged there, and he trusted her judgment. He wasn't a prolific writer, nor one who ever found it easy. Time and again she had begged him to let himself go, to burst into flame over something and burn up with it—and burn his readers with that flame. He was too cold, too logical, she had said. His treatment of a theme was apt to be too dispassionate—there was nothing to quicken the pulse or to indicate that his own had been beating fast when he wrote the words.

Ann was far too eager, too vivid herself, in her outlook on life, to be wholly sympathetic with Michael's quieter, graver methods. She thought he sacrificed force to mere perfection

of finish—he was too studied. She knew her occasional attempted analyses of his faults as a creative worker weren't wholly just, but they were apt to be pretty discerning, and decidedly practical, nevertheless. The things she had prophesied wouldn't go usually didn't; when now and then she was genuinely praiseful, editors were likely to be consistently the same.

"I don't know whether I can tell you," Ann said, after a moment, with heightening colour. "You've written a great many things I've liked, but—well—you haven't often, to be perfectly frank—stirred me. I've been left coolly convinced, or pleasantly pleased, but not warmly proud—exactly. Of course, I've been proud of you—often and often. But not in just this way. Why, Michael dear, I'm actually all alive with delight in those sketches. From start to finish they're exquisitely done. Oh, it's more than that! They're done with vigour and virility—they're *telling!* They—*get* me. There! I don't know why I can't tell you more nearly what I mean. Perhaps I can—when I've calmed down."

Michael's own face had taken on a tinge of deeper colour under this praise. The amazing truth was that he had never realized until this moment that Ann's approval of his effort had often been forced, that she had been loyally endeavouring to appreciate much oftener than

she had been actually compelled to admire. When honesty commanded, she had criticized. He couldn't remember when he had swept her off her feet as she was now declaring he had done. If he had achieved something new, so had she experienced something new. Quite evidently she was very happy—gloriously happy—to have anything he had done "get her" in just this amazing way.

XXX

"MISS HEATH, I've been plugging away at clinics, you've been plugging away at correspondence—and Heaven knows what else. What do you say to a day off for both of us —together?"

Julia Heath looked with some surprise at Dr. Gaysworthy, who had just come from an interview with Mrs. Braithwaite. A frown had lain heavily between his brows as he closed the door behind him, but it disappeared at sight of his patient's social secretary, passing through the hall, looking particularly fresh and cool on this hot August morning. Her exquisitely smooth, dark hair, her clear beauty, her crisp green linen frock, all struck him as a refreshing contrast to the sallow, pasty face, and careless attire of the woman he had just left. Beatty's case had seemed more than ordinarily difficult and distasteful to him this morning.

Julia paused. "How would you spend it?"

"Either I'd hire a little car from the village garage, or—the thing I'd like better yet, if you were game, would be to put some sandwiches in

a basket, along with the materials for making coffee, and just tramp away across country. How about it? Is it too hot? Please say it isn't. We needn't make it a walking match, you know."

"It's not too hot. I'd like it above all things, and I prefer the walk to the drive. I'll be ready whenever you wish. This is my free day. Shall I make the sandwiches?"

"Good for you! No, I'll make the sandwiches —I'm a shark at it. I'll be back within the hour."

His face had become that of a lively boy. He hurried away down to the house, to ravage his sister's stores. Before the hour was up he was back at the Court, hatless, coatless, knickers clothing his sturdy legs, a stuffed wallet swinging at his side, the strap over his shoulder. He looked gratified as Julia came out to meet him. She was dressed much like himself, except that she wore a soft grey hat pulled over her eyes, which were bright with the sense of freedom and expected adventure.

"Now you look like the girl you are, instead of the correct young person you're supposed to be," he said, as they swung away through the garden paths toward the stretch of mingled open country and woodland lying back of the Braithwaite acres.

"I feel like that—though I'm no girl, you

know," she answered. "And it's so long since I've had a real holiday—one like this—I'm all eagerness to be off. Which way do we go?"

"I don't know this country, and if you've been so tied up I don't imagine you do. Suppose we just steer for those hills we can see through the trees across the valley. I want to find a lane with thorn-apple trees and scraggly blackberry bushes growing along it, and rail fences on either side. Anyhow, I'm with you, and that's enough for me for the present. I've been wanting that ever since I met you."

She had known he would be like this—since straight to the point was his one simple way of getting at everything in life. It was his frankness which had interested her from the beginning.

"And I'm with you," she said, smiling as she looked straight ahead. "And that's enough for me."

"Is it?" He gave her a quick, keen survey. Then he reached over and gently pulled off the soft grey hat. "What did you wear it for? Not to shield your eyes from me? I want to see your eyes—with the sunlight shining right into 'em. Mind if I stuff it into my pocket?"

"I mind very much. It's my one means of defence against such a gay buccaneer as you. Give it back, and I'll put it on to please you better."

She turned the soft brim up in front and

pulled the hat on again. "You see how becoming it is?" she urged.

"Granted. But—lord—you don't need to enhance yourself. I'm all in and all tied up, so far as appreciating you is concerned."

She laughed. "Is that the way they talk in Korea, Dr. Gaysworthy?"

"Please say Dan. We're off for such a day as will stand out in our memories for a thousand years—I hope. I don't want to waste a minute of it. Why should we—Julia Heath?"

They weren't yet a quarter mile from the Court when he said this. It was a challenging opening, and she instantly decided to play up to him. Why shouldn't a man who had been slaving for years in a foreign country be allowed at least one day that would stand out in his memory for a thousand years? Unquestionably, if he kept on as he had begun, it would stand out in hers. Well, life hadn't any too many of such days to offer.

"We shouldn't waste a minute of it—Dan. But—I don't promise not to call you Dr. Gaysworthy again to-morrow."

"Sufficient unto the day is the good thereof—all right." He was striding along at a steady pace, for they were still on the parklike ground of the estate, well shaded. "I want to get just as

far away as possible, if you don't mind, before we stop to rest," he explained. "Look! Isn't that an Enchanted Land we're bound for over there? There never was any use, to my mind, in saying things one doesn't mean, and not much use in not saying things one does mean—unless to infants and invalids. Do you want to get there without going over the road, or are you content to walk all the way between?"

Again his look at her was the sort to evade, if she didn't want her thoughts to be read. She might as well be honest.

"I want all the way between—and then all that's there," she said, and looked up at him with a direct glance which seemed to hold no evasions. His smile back at her was a gorgeous one.

"You *do* get me! And now—would you think me queer if I didn't talk much till we're there?"

"I think I could understand that too."

"That's great. Then—we're off. Over this fence—jolly, you can vault, can you? I didn't think it. Now, come on—friend."

That last word somehow touched her. She had so few friends up here in the North. She had been very lonely, though she had hardly admitted it, even to herself. And this man could be a wonderful friend, she knew. It was easy to see

that he had a genius for friendship, though he might not exercise it right and left.

It was a singular walk. Taken in almost complete silence, it lasted a full hour. When they came to fences Dan stood aside to watch with pleasure, as Julia lifted herself lightly over. His gay whistle applauded her, but he offered her no hand even when they came to a running brook; his gallantry didn't seem to be of the devoted squire sort. It was as if he and she were a pair of lads off on a lark together. She liked this in him, the more that she was unused to it from the Southern men she had known all her life. It seemed to be his way of saying that in spite of his bluntness she needn't fear anything sentimental from him, only the openness that is like that of the sunlight, revealing and warming, frank and fair.

When they reached the desired hillside they found it dense with undergrowth. Dan hunted about for a trail or cart-path, and finally found the remains of one. At its opening he paused.

"Rather not charge on up?" he queried.

"I'd rather charge on up," she declared, though she took off the grey hat and fanned her cheeks with it, and pushed the flattened black locks back from the brow which looked so white in contrast with the dark line of her hair.

"Secretarial work isn't muscle producing,"

he admitted. "Since you're ready to go, I'm going to make you rest—for ten minutes. Have this log?"

She sat down upon it, while he looked about him until he found a straight young sapling of ash. He pulled out a jackknife and cut it six feet long, trimmed it carefully, and presented it to her. "Stout yet light," he recommended. "Call it a staff or an alpenstock, as you prefer. It matches your hat in colour, doesn't it?—which I understand is an essential, for a woman."

She accepted it with pleasure, running her fingers over the smooth grey bark. She said to herself as she did so that the staff would have a long life—it was much better than a dance favour or even a book as a memento. "Don't you want one for yourself?"

He shook his head. "I seem to be made of iron. I suppose some day I'll discover suddenly that I'm lath and plaster, like other human structures. Well—if you're ready—I begin to want to get to the top, don't you? I don't know what's there—and yet I do. A flat rock, some scrubby pines, plenty of that nice coarse fern that smells good when you rub it through your fingers—and a far view. If we don't get the view I'll be badly disappointed, but I'm pretty sure I spotted an opening with an outlook west.

Anyhow, we have the fun of exploration, which is even better than the fun of discovery—eh?"

He looked at her. "I think I'm learning that," she said. "I used not to know it."

"Then you're developing properly. That knowledge marks a distinct stage in life. Yet plenty of people never reach it. This climb up, now—don't you relish it?"

It was rather a hard climb, and she was not made of iron. He discerned this, and now and again his arm reached down to her and gave her a strong pull upward. She was breathing rapidly when at length they reached the summit, and found, as Dan had been confident they would, the long view which paid them for the difficult ascent.

"And there's the flat rock—the scrubby pines —and the fern," Julia pointed out rather breathlessly. "Also—this delicious—little—breeze." She sank down upon a thick carpet of pine needles, with her back against a tree. "Not another—step—Dr. Dan, till I've had a—sandwich."

"As many as you please. I used up a whole loaf of bread and everything else in sight, making 'em. And now, in twenty minutes, I promise you the best coffee you ever drank."

He kept his word. Her eyes were closed in a grateful relaxation from the fatigue of the jour-

ney when he came to her with a brimming, steaming cup.

"It looks too hot for a hot day, I know, but it will smooth out that weariness like a flatiron on a tumbled piece of silk. For that's what you are, you know—silk."

"I suppose so—from your point of view. And what are you?—This coffee *is* delicious—I never tasted anything so good."

"Thanks. Have a sandwich. I recommend a cheese one—you need something both savoury and supporting."

She looked amusedly at the generously thick slices, both of bread and of cheese, with plenty of butter on the bread. "This is regular pilgrim fare," she said. "Oh, but it's good! What are the others?"

"Egg with lettuce, and jam. I told you I filched everything in sight. Ann was off somewhere, and Michael was pounding the typewriter. What they'll have for lunch is no concern of mine."

He drank off a cupful of clear coffee in one long draught, then set his strong white teeth into a big sandwich filled with egg, and ate like the hungry man that he was.

"You haven't told me what you are—if I am silk," she reminded him.

"Me? Oh, I'm—burlap."

"No, you're linen—a very strong quality, that wears much better than silk."

He laughed and refilled her cup. "I need to wear," he said. "Try an egg sandwich."

"I prefer jam."

"You would. I made them for you. But I like 'em myself. You'll have to make your meal on sandwiches. That's all there is—except fruit—peaches—big, juicy ones."

They ate and were filled. When the remains of the feast had been cleared away by Dan's capable hands—he was enough of a squire not to let Julia help—he proposed a sleep for his companion. "Your jolly long lashes are dropping over your eyes," he said, "and you'd give your last farthing to shut them for half an hour. I've no cushions for you, except these pine needles, but they'll do for a child as sleepy as you. I'm going over beyond that boulder, with my pipe, and I'll stay there—or elsewhere—till I hear you call. Then—I've a book in my pocket, and I'm going to read to you and see if you like what I like."

Nothing loath, for, as he had seen, she was overcome with the delicious weariness which induces the desire to sleep, she laid herself upon the fragrant couch of the pine needles, and before he was fairly out of sight she was off.

XXXI

THE walk had really been a long one for Julia, and she slept without stirring until gradually she became aware of a voice softly yet vigorously chanting:

"It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make man better be;
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,
To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sere."

She opened her eyes. Dan's long frame was stretched, knees down, upon the ground ten feet away; his elbows made props, so that his face rested in his cupped hands. He was reading from a small brown book. His voice went on:

"A lily of a day
Is fairer far in May
Although it fall and die that night—
It was the plant and flower of light;
In small proportions we just beauties see,
And in short measures life may perfect be."

Julia sat up, putting up exploring fingers to her hair.

"How long have I slept?"

He looked up, smiling. "Just as long as I could bear it to let you. I began by looking at my watch every ten minutes, then every five. Then I started to estimate what proportion of the remaining hours before sunset and evening star I could endure having you so near and yet so far, and I became violently restless. I hummed a tune— *'Oh, how I hate to get up in the morning.'* You didn't stir. Shaking you seemed a poor proposition, and I had no water to pour over your face. The reading of poetry frequently puts people to sleep—I had an idea it might bring *you* awake. I began in a faint respectful tone—no effect. I increased the volume —*crescendo—forte—double forte.* Finally, I thundered. You stirred—I *diminuendo-ed.* You slid off again. Then I began to roar—by no means like a sucking dove—and you opened your eyes; whereupon my voice sank to the dulcet tones of which you recently became aware. You look—by George!—you do look really awake, at last!"

She was looking very much awake, her somewhat sunburned face turned toward him, her eyes merry. "How much of all this is true?"

"Every word of it. I must have been brutal in the pace I led you over and up here, to have made you so tired as that. I don't believe you

ever walked so far in your life. And you were such a game youngster, you never peeped."

"No, I never did walk so far in my life, Dr. Dan."

"*Must* you put on that handle? It seemed so darned good to hear my name without it—just for to-day. Think how many years I've been exiled."

His eyes besought her, like those of a boy—yet not like those of a boy.

"All right—Dan. And I'm not a bit tired now."

"What did you do while you were growing up? Ride?"

"Mostly."

"Behind the old family horses?"

"Not so much as on the young ones. I had a wonder of a black mare—Betsy. She had all the spirit in the world, yet I could almost manage her with my voice."

"I should think you easily might—much more easily than I managed you with mine, just now. Go on—please. Where did you ride on her? Did you ride alone?"

"All over the Virginia country, for miles around. I sometimes rode alone."

"And the other times?"

"Young Southern people ride a great deal. Some of them rode with me."

"I'll wager they did—especially the males! Did you live in one of those white houses with the tall pillars? And two verandas, one above the other?"

She shook her head, and her eyes looked as if they were seeing things far away. "Our house was grey."

"Painted?"

"Stone."

"I begin to get it. Acres of grounds around it?"

"We've—sold a good deal of that."

"I'm asking too many questions—I know it. I want so much to know about you. If I won't ask any more questions, will you tell me a little about you? If you will, I'll tell you a little about me. Don't you think two friends ought to have some idea of each other's lives to start with?"

She didn't mean to tell him much, when she slowly began, but before she ended he had a good deal—partly from her recital, much more from inference and divination. She said nothing about wealth or position, certainly nothing of ensuing loss or poverty, but it was easy for him to understand how times must have changed with her, since the days when she went dashing across country on the shining black back of the thoroughbred mare Betsy. She touched with but few words upon the death of her father and

mother, one after the other, but somehow he gathered that they were broken by circumstances, though their pride in and loyalty to their home, their county and their state, remained to the end. They were gone before the World War came on.

"Or they would never have let me go into the service—they wouldn't have thought I could endure it," she said, positively. "But I did endure it—I grew strong under it. Of course I'm soft again now, as I proved to you to-day."

"You went to France?"

"No, I couldn't, because Dale—my brother—was there; you remember how strict the rules were. But I served in Hostess Houses at Southern camps for two years. It was—an experience. You went—Dan?"

"Yes, of course. I was just through with my hospital training here, and the experience in the Army Surgical Service over there equipped me for my Korean hospital as nothing else could have done."

"Tell me about it—you promised."

"I want to. I want to tell you everything. I haven't had that luxury since the world began—haven't wanted it. Now—you—something about you, Julia Heath—makes me want to turn myself inside out. Can you stand it?"

"Indeed I can."

After all, he made a simple and short recital of it, using terse phrases, not expansive ones. He might have been a newspaper writer, ordered to boil down five verbose columns into half of one restrained one, and still omit nothing and hold his reader. But when he was done, Julia felt as if the man's life lay open before her. Perhaps it was the thing he said last that had the culminating effect:

"So, here I am, marking time till I can get back into service again. You know—I want you to understand this fully, Julia—it's not a virtue in me that I throw myself into my work like a madman—it's merely temperament. I'm the son of a medical missionary, who was the son of a bishop, who was the son of a martyr to a great National cause. I seem to *have* to do something that takes driving energy and has a big need in it."

She looked at him, wondering. From lying on his side, as he talked, he had come to a sitting posture, then had sprung to his feet, and now stood with one foot on an old stump, his fist clenched on his upraised knee, pounding knee with fist as he said "energy" and "need." He simply couldn't remain inert, either in mind or body; she saw that plainly, as she had seen it all along. And she found something fascinating in this boundless virility, as most of us do; it

called to her to be alive with a zest in life like this—and an accomplishment. He was alive, from active brain to skilful finger tips; she envied him.

She said it—she couldn't help it. "Oh, how I envy you!"

"You do? Do you mean that? Why should you?"

"Why shouldn't I? If you could see yourself!"

"I have—a good many times. I wear a straw helmet till it drops to pieces—if I wear any at all. I omit to pipe-clay my shoes. I rumple up my hair and forget to smooth it down. Altogether, I suppose I'm a wild man!"

He had accomplished his purpose, he had made her laugh. She had been very sober all through her own recital, and a wistful look had come into her face during his. He was pretty sure she had much to trouble her.

"Nevertheless, I envy you. You look like a man in love with his work, and that's so rare a look—in fact, one almost never sees it. It must be frightfully hard work, too. I wish you'd explain it."

"Why, that's easy. It's interesting—tremendously interesting. If you could see that hospital——"

"I wish I could. And you at work in it."

He was looking intently at her, and a peculiar

expression came into his eyes. "You really wish that?"

"Indeed I do. Why shouldn't I? As I tell you, I've almost never seen anybody who seemed to be wanting to do what he had to do. My brother Dale, for instance—he's working away, pluckily enough, but he hates it—every bit of it."

"But that's no good, you know." Dan's tone was full of conviction. "No good at all. You've got to like what you're doing or you can't put the best of yourself into it. And if you can't put the best of yourself into it—what else is there to put?"

"Nothing much, I suppose."

"Nothing at all, from my point of view. A man can do a detestable job, from sheer force of will, of course; and do it more or less well, perhaps. But if he has to leave *himself* out—the real man—well, it's not so much that he won't get results, but—worse—he won't actually live. For it's my belief—no new or original one—that we can only live—live as we were meant to live—if we are putting every ounce of ourselves into something so worth doing that it makes us jolly glad every day, all over again, that we're doing it."

She sighed. "That's pretty hard on all the people in the world who can't find anything of that sort to do."

"But everybody can—somehow. Why—there's a native woman who's on the scrubbing force in my hospital. She had to be taught how to scrub—as Americans and surgeons understand scrubbing. She had to be shown how essential it was to successful surgery in that hospital that she should keep all her corners clean. When she once got the idea—that she was a part of the whole thing, and a mighty important part—she began to put herself into that job. And now she does it with such a shining face that she fairly lights up whatever spot she's working in. I like to go past her—she's a partner of mine, and she feels it."

As Dan said these things Julia's look of envy grew. She had never known anybody like him; he deeply stirred her, though he was as far from all her previous ideals as man could well be. She felt herself somehow intensely stimulated, actually thrilled. He saw this in her face, and suddenly he came to a determination. An "explosive Gaysworthy," he was, indeed!

"I believe," he said, watching her closely, "you're somehow all at sea about your life. You don't know what to do with it. For some reason you've taken this secretarial job, but you dislike it. It's not you who are doing it, but an unhappy substitute for your real self. You're looking for something better, and you don't know where to

find it. I don't know how to say what's in my mind, for fear you'll misunderstand it. But sometimes in life one has to make a quick decision, without much to go on. May I speak out?"

A heavy rumble of thunder interrupted him. It seemed to come out of a clear sky, for the sun was still shining brightly on the distant valley. But as Dan jumped up to reconnoitre, a dark cloud showed itself above the tree tops, and at almost the same instant a wind came blowing from nowhere, and struck sharply through the wood behind them. The temperature fell as if it had been struck a blow, and without further warning a summer tempest was upon them.

As the rain dropped out of the skies like the sudden releasing of a great lake, it was Julia's impulse to run for shelter under the biggest tree in sight. But Dan drew her out into the open. The lightning was becoming incessant, while the thunder crashed like a cannonade.

"Safer here," he shouted, as they stood in the downpour. "Sorry I haven't a tarpaulin to cover you with!"

As he spoke a tree a hundred yards away was struck, and Julia realized that getting wet was a pleasant alternative to getting hit.

The storm passed as quickly as it came, leaving the wettest pair of people in the county.

There was nothing left to do but to make their way home at the fastest pace they could manage, for there were no houses on the route across country which they had taken. As Dan left Julia at her door he said, with a smile and a little speech which she remembered for hours:

"In spite of this poor ending, it's been a great day—to me. Some day, before long, I'm going to do that speaking out that the cataclysm interrupted. Meanwhile—I don't suppose there's another woman in the world who could get soaked to the skin and afterward look less like a drowned rat than you do!—You look to me as if you were about to come alive. You haven't been really alive, yet—tinglingly alive, you know—not from my point of view. But you're going to be!"

XXXII

"THIS can't be the place, driver!"

"Yes, ma'am. This is where they live now. Burned out last year. Live here now. The Paiges. Yes, ma'am."

"The *Michael* Paiges?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"But this is a *lodge!*"

"Yes, ma'am. It used to be. I guess it ain't that now. No, ma'am."

The taxi-driver's fare, who looked extremely like a young woman of quality and fashion, paid the man off and got out. As she went toward it she was eyeing the small old brick house critically. "Of course it *is* attractive," she admitted to herself. "But it certainly *is* a lodge. Ann always was unexpected. Yet I thought, with that clever husband——"

She stood upon the stone doorstep, and let the old brass knocker fall upon the weather beaten green door. A moment later, trailing an expensive faint fragrance, she crossed the threshold and was in Ann Paige's welcoming arms.

"Ann Gaysworthy!"

"Maddy Warren!"

Mrs. Dupont held her old school friend off

and looked her up and down, affectionately and appraisingly. Her delicate, red-tinted lips smiled peculiarly. "Maddy Warren it will be again presently," she stated frankly. "I'm not keeping Geoff's name after I divorce him. We went to Paris to arrange for that. But the papers aren't put through yet, so I'm Maddy Dupont still.—Never mind about me, though. I just thought I might as well tell you and get it over. I couldn't bear to when we sailed."

"But I must mind," said Ann, her face showing her feeling. "You and Geoff—Oh, I'm so sorry!"

"You needn't be," declared her guest, with an effect of casualness. "I'm not—exactly. It was an adventure. We didn't hit it off together. It's over. . . . Now about you and Michael Paige —I've never seen him, you know. But I've heard about him. I suppose he's yours for life, and you his—in the old fashioned way."

"In the old fashioned way," agreed Ann. She couldn't go on about Michael, with Madeline divorcing her husband. "Oh, Maddy, it's great to see you! You can never know how often I've thought of you this year. How could I help it —wearing your clothes—such clothes! Since they were yours, and nobody else's, it's been great fun."

"Don't mention 'em," begged Mrs. Dupont,

with a gesture as if to sweep the subject away, though her quick and discerning glance noted the frock that clothed Ann at the moment. "They were rags. Not to be spoken of in the same breath was that you have on——"

"This is one of them."

"No!"

"Yes."

"*Ciel!* May I have it back?"

Madeline Dupont's gay laugh was almost the one which had endeared her to Ann in past years. Not quite. It was gay, but no longer merry with the old light-heartedness. If she was divorcing Geoff, Ann decided, it was not because she no longer cared for him. Too bad. . . . Suppose she, Ann, were divorcing Michael. A shiver ran over her. Michael! And becoming Ann Gaysworthy again, saying to somebody: "I'm not keeping Michael's name after I . . ."

It seemed that Mrs. Dupont's visit was only a flying one. She was on her way somewhere, as usual—she was a restless person and an inveterate traveller. She had examined time-tables and asked questions, and found that she could stop over a half day in which to run out from Boston and look up Ann. Between thirsty sips of tea and a dainty devouring of thin bread-and-butter, she admitted that she had long been filled with a consuming curiosity as to the suc-

cess of Ann's marriage. She had become horribly cynical, she protested, as to the possibility of any marriage being a success.

"I was undoubtedly the most gloriously happy bride," she said with a mocking twist of her expressive lips, "who ever came down the steps of a church smiling into the eye of the newspaper man's camera. And now . . ." Then the bitter tone turned—so like Maddy!—to an amused one. "Oh, do you know, I met Beatty Lawton in the South Station—Beatty Lawton, whom I detested so cordially at school. That's how I learned the way to get to you so quickly. Poor old Beatty! She really was quite a beauty once—Charlton Braithwaite was crazy about her when he married her. I hardly knew her,—so faded, so gone to pieces. What has she done to herself?"

Ann told her, and Madeline seemed to listen; but after her fashion she was soon back at the subject which most interested her.

"Beatty's Lawton's marriage might be expected to go smash." She dismissed Mrs. Charlton Braithwaite as she had dismissed Beatty the schoolgirl, with a flip of her thumb and finger. "But, Ann, *you* do look happy. If your husband will only come in before I go I shall know at a glance whether he is happy too. . . ."

"Yes, you'll know that too," said Ann.

"As for you—you don't seem a day older than when I saw you last. I'm wildly anxious to know why."

"Good gracious," cried Ann, laughing. "I shouldn't want to be so idiotically unworn by the years as that. You know I do show them—everybody does."

"But you've kept a certain look," her friend persisted, "that the rest of us haven't kept. I don't know what it is. I think perhaps it's just that you haven't taken on the bored look. Everybody else I know who's been married eight years—or even four—does look bored. Bored to death. Unless, of course, she's having an affair with somebody else, in which case she looks excited. But you—though you don't look excited, neither are you bored. Or else you're an amazing actress. Please, if you love me—you used to—tell me why."

"I'm *not* bored. Why should I look it? And I'm certainly no actress."

Involuntarily Madeline Dupont glanced about her, though her eyes came quickly and apologetically back to Ann's. "It's a dear little house," she said warmly. "Only—of course I'm so used to living in the thick of things——"

"I know." Ann now drew herself up a little, as she faced her smiling, cynical friend. "Well

. . . I don't know that I can offer you any explanations, Maddy. Or give you any philosophy of life for your edification. Michael and I *have* got on well together. I don't mean that things always have been smooth—they haven't. But—we went into marriage with the idea of seeing it through; we didn't take it on as an experiment. We didn't let any little roughness upset us—send us into the ditch. If our car jolted on the road, we just hung on tight and waited to come to a smoother place—as we always did. Michael's worked hard and been an awfully good sport, and I just naturally had to be. And I certainly can't be bored when there are so many interesting things to do."

"As, for instance, what?" inquired Mrs. Dupont—and bit her lip. "Forgive my impertinence, Ann darling. But you see, I do really need to know."

"Well, I'll tell you. We've found an adorable little old house half a mile from here, up the prettiest lane you ever saw. It's even smaller than this one, but it has great possibilities. We got it for a song—a couple of songs, anyhow. We're having the best time you ever knew, making it over ourselves. Of course we're eager to have our own home again, though this has been a mighty nice place to stay, through the kindness

of the Braithwaites, till we could find something we could afford. Michael and I are shingling the little house, ourselves, and we're going to paint it. I don't suppose you could possibly imagine, Maddy, what fun it is to do things like that."

Her old school friend shrugged her slender shoulders, and threw out her hands in a gesture of bafflement. "Ann Gaysworthy," she said, "I don't believe you'd own defeat if you were beaten to the earth!"

"See here, Maddy!" Ann now spoke like a young Major-General, fire in her eyes. "I want you to understand me, and understand me thoroughly. I'd rather live in that little house with Michael Paige than travel round the world with any other man I ever knew. And as for that beaten-to-the-earth stuff—I'll wager that if you'd never heard that phrase, or any other of the excuses of these times for putting your hand to the plough and then turning back the first time you hit a stone in the field, you wouldn't——"

She paused, for Michael was striding up the path. Mrs. Dupont, catching her change of expression, turned also. Michael opened the door and came in. His lips were clamped tight over his pipe-stem, and a parcel of books was under

his arm. He was wearing slightly shabby but undeniably well-cut clothes. He pulled off his hat, removed his pipe, and, seeing the guest, bent upon her an interested gaze the intentness of which suggested to her that very little was likely to escape it.

"Maddy, this is my husband," said Ann, proudly. "Michael—" on the impulse of the moment she put him to the test in the most exacting way that could have flashed into her mind —"this is my old school friend, Madeline Warren Dupont, who sent me that magnificent box of clothes when I was going round in some borrowed ones that didn't fit, after the fire. Maddy, we've called them 'Duponts,' all the year. Could we have honoured you more?"

"I'm sure you couldn't," agreed her friend, staring at Michael with a pair of brilliant eyes which looked as if something hurt their gaze.

"They've been very nice clothes for Ann," said Michael, shaking hands, "and still are, I believe. You were a friend in a crisis, Mrs. Dupont, and your name will go down in our family history."

"So this is Michael Paige," said Maddy Dupont, still frankly studying Ann's husband. "Ann, do you remember what you were saying, just now, about where you'd rather live?"

"Yes," said Ann. "And I repeat, and reiterate, and reassert it."

"Then let me say that I don't blame you, and that I quite understand."

"Where would you rather live, Ann?" asked Michael.

"As I told Maddy," said Ann, "in the little house we're shingling, with you."

XXXIII

DR. DANIEL GAYSWORTHY had again been away for a fortnight. On the day following his tramp across the valley with Julia Heath he had been summoned by telegraph to the bedside of an old friend, a former college classmate. He had gone, had worked with all his might, had stayed till Nick Ellsworth was on his feet again. Then he had returned to the old house at the South gate, thankful to be back. For the first time that Ann could recall, he confessed to a touch of weariness.

"But only a touch, you know, Ann," he insisted. "Haven't taken time to sleep much lately." He was stretched out full length on an old high-backed bench on the porch, his hands clasped behind his head. It was early evening, dusk just coming down. "To-morrow I'll be fit as a fiddle again. Meanwhile—I want to know everything that's happened in this fortnight."

"Very well, dear. Where shall I begin?"

"Where you like—only *begin!*"

"You impatient boy! I suppose that means—up at the big house. Nothing happens here except that Michael keeps grinding away at his

work. Well, then—Beatty Braithwaite's no better. I think she's getting drugs and taking them all the time, though we don't know how."

"Traitor in the camp, somewhere. It's probably that tricky-eyed maid. Why doesn't Braithwaite fire her?"

"Beatty won't let him. She goes into such a state if he proposes it he doesn't dare do it."

"I'll fix that. She can go into a state with me—it won't bother me in the least."

"He may not let you. He has an idea that if she's opposed too much she may lose her balance —mentally."

"She never had any. And she'll lose it, the way she's going, quicker than she will our way. Well—that's enough of her. How's Braithwaite himself?"

"Hanging on grimly—trying to forget, I imagine. Away a good deal, yet he does all for Beatty that she'll let him."

"Poor devil! I'll look him up right away."

"He spends a good deal of time with Michael. They get on famously."

"I certainly am glad of that. Well—how's Julia Heath?"

"This is what he really wants to know," thought Ann. "And he may as well know it all." So she said, as casually as possible: "It's so nice

to see her have some chance for diversion, outside of her duties at the Court. It turns out that a neighbour of ours, Brinton Constant, knew her in the Hostess House at the southern camp where they both were before he went to France. The minute he found she was here he began to do everything for her he could think of. They seem to be great friends. He's a particularly fine chap."

"They do.—He is.—Oh!—Hell!" It was a series of deep detonations, as though far down within his consciousness something had exploded. There ensued a silence for a brief space. Then Dan sat up, got up, began to march up and down the flagged porch floor, his hands in his pockets, apparently forgetting that touch of fatigue to which he had confessed. After a few turns he walked off the porch onto the lawn, and hatless, hands in pockets, marched rapidly away toward the Court without so much as taking leave. Ann watched the sturdy figure out of sight, then as it disappeared among the heavy shadows of the trees she said softly to Michael: "That news hit him hard, don't you think?"

"I should judge it did," her husband agreed. "But, since he is what he is, he's probably gone up to the Court now to find Julia Heath and ask her what the facts are. That's his simple

method of getting at anything he wants to know, and the queer part of it is that nobody seems to resent it, from him."

Michael was nearer right than even he imagined. Dan was on his way straight to Julia, if he could find her.

XXXIV

AT the moment of Dan's departure for the Court Julia was reading aloud to a restless listener in an overheated bedroom.

"Put down that stupid book!" Beatty cried out after ten minutes of restless and intermittent listening. "Talk to me—tell me something interesting. Oh, it's maddening to see you sit there looking as serene as a May morning while I lie here feeling like the devil. Talk to me—distract me—from these hideous nerves!"

"What shall I talk about, Mrs. Braithwaite?" Julia closed the book.

"Anything, I tell you, provided it's got some snap to it. When's Dan Gaysworthy coming back—have you heard? I wish he'd come. He's the only person in the world who can get my mind off myself. Talk to me about him. Of course you know I adore him."

Her suffused eyes and shaky speech told Julia that she was in one of her irresponsible states and must be dealt with carefully.

"I think Dr. Gaysworthy's not back," Julia said evenly. "And you know he's told you that

you could do more for yourself than he or anybody could. If you don't feel like sleep, why not come down with me into the garden? It's wonderful there to-night. And your husband is on the porch—he'd be delighted to stroll about the paths with you."

"Oh, would he! That's the last thing he'd be delighted to do. Now if *you'd* walk with him, that would be a different matter. I look old and haggard as a fool.—You're young and—I've no doubt he thinks you're pretty. He always could see a woman's fine points."

Julia had to make herself remember that her employer was undoubtedly more or less under the influence of some brain-turning drug. At a certain stage Beatty usually turned insolent.

"Please come," Julia urged, controlling an intense dislike. "It will do you good and make you sleep."

"Much it will! But I'll come—if you'll promise to tell me all about yourself while we walk. You must have a history—if only it isn't too prim and poky to interest anybody but a clergyman."

Beatty set her slippered feet upon the rug, pulling herself up from the chaise-longue where she had been extended. She rang for her maid and ordered her to bring a light wrap. When this silken and furred garment had been laid

about her shoulders she surveyed herself in a long mirror.

"Oh, what a wreck I am!" she muttered. "If that can't make me look stunning, nothing can."

"You're not a wreck—you look charming in that wrap. Now please hold your head up, Mrs. Braithwaite." Julia's tone was spirited. "Put your shoulders back. Smile at her as if you liked her."

"But I don't—I detest her—I'd like to kill her." It was a dark look Beatty gave the figure in the glass, and Julia felt her shudder. A sense of deep pity laid hold of her as she took the other woman's arm. Still so young—and come to this!

"Please!" she said gently. "We'll go out into this glorious September night and forget ourselves and our looks."

With one of her quick changes of attitude toward Julia Beatty turned and dropped her head upon the lovely shoulder so close to her. "Glorious September night!" she groaned. "I wonder if any night will ever look like that to me again."

"This one will, I promise you. It can't help it. Come—don't cry." And Julia drew the half-resisting form along with her, out into the hall, and slowly down the great staircase.

It was as the two were returning from a slow,

unsteady pacing of the grassy garden walks that Dan Gaysworthy rounded the corner of the house and came upon them. At the same moment Charlton Braithwaite, looking up from his reading, became aware of the presence of his wife and her companion. The four met at the edge of the porch.

"Oh, Dan Gaysworthy!" Beatty cried out his name. She moved toward him, stumbling. He made a quick step forward and caught her. She clung to him, laughing oddly. "Oh, if *you* were always here, I'd get well. Charlton, why don't you offer him an enormous fee and *make* him stay and look after me till I'm myself again?"

"I'm afraid Dr. Gaysworthy can't be tied with fees," was Charlton's response. His eye had been quick to note Dan's instinctive stiffening under Beatty's clasp of his arms; he didn't blame him. His idea of this doctor was that the adoration of women patients was the last thing he cared for; Charlton liked him for that. The other men whom Beatty had employed had always played up to her advances, whether they welcomed them or not. After all, she had always possessed a certain attractiveness; even now she hadn't wholly lost it.

"I shall be off before many weeks," Dan responded curtly. "You've got to learn to stand alone, you know, Mrs. Braithwaite—but—with

this man beside you." And he led Beatty across the few steps to her husband, and, taking her hand, placed it in Charlton's quickly offered arm.

"My gracious, but you're old fashioned!" was Beatty's high-keyed reply to this. "Don't you know, in these days, one's husband is the last person in the world to be interested in what one does?" And she laughed shrilly, in a way none of them liked to hear.

Charlton led her away into the house, his back pretty rigid, but his manner all that could be asked. Dan looked after him pityingly, his face very sober. When the two were out of sight he turned to Julia, and his expression changed.

"You want a different sort of walk, don't you? Suppose we try the open road. It's early yet, and the moonlight makes it look like a river of silver out there. Will you come?"

XXXV

SO PRESENTLY they were out upon the highway, pacing along briskly, as they might have done in the daytime. Even in September moonlight, that made roads look like rivers of silver, Dan was no loiterer, either in step or speech.

"Julia, I've something to say to you. We left our talk incomplete on the day of the tramp and the storm. I wonder if you remember that?"

It was as impossible as ever to meet his frankness with anything but frankness. "No, I've not forgotten it, Dr. Gaysworthy."

"Back on the old formal ground, am I? . . . Well, all right, for the time being. . . . Now, listen to me, please."

He paused for a moment, then broke into it.

"If I'd said what I meant to say that day, it would have been wholly on impulse. Now I've had time to think it over. And I'm still going to say it, though I don't know how you'll take it. That day I thought maybe there was a chance you'd take it as I meant it. Now—I don't know. But I think it's only fair to tell you. You'd given

me the idea that you were unhappy, all at sea about what to do with your life. You said—and you seemed to say it honestly—that you envied me my zest in life, my conviction that I was getting and giving the best possible. You said—I wonder if you meant that—you'd like to see me at work over there?"

He paused, looking down at her.

"Of course I meant it."

"Well, then, what I want to tell you is this:—You can see me at work, and join me in it, if you'll marry me and go back to Korea with me."

It was an amazing proposal, coming as it did in the crispest possible voice—no hesitations, no low, appealing tones—just as he might have suggested their going into town together for the day. Julia stood still, startled and not altogether sure that he was for the moment quite sane.

"Why—you strange, strange man!" she said, and her amazed tone was touched with displeasure.

"Please don't take it like that," he urged. "I might have known you would. You're a little Virginian, used to other sorts of men. They're trained in chivalrous, fine manners. I'm a blunt fellow—don't know how to do a thing except to do it. I seem to have no circumlocutions or diplomacies in me. See here, Julia—if you don't like my speaking out like that, you'll have to

just step on me. In fact—I guess you have already. The thing seems to you unthinkable?"

"It isn't that." She really didn't know how to deal with a man so brusque and abrupt as this, yet she couldn't exactly be offended with him. "It's—I suppose it's your way of putting it—without——"

"Without what?"

She looked at him now, puzzled to know how to speak. She threw her clasped hands apart with a little gesture of wonder. "Can't you possibly imagine what such an—offer—lacks?"

"What does it lack? I thought it comprised everything."

"Then—you're very stupid."

"I'm afraid I am. I couldn't possibly ask you to marry me if I didn't want you to, could I? Want it—with all my heart?"

"Oh! Then your heart really is involved?"

"My heart! Why, Julia—my heart's so involved it can't even act properly. It's thudding away inside of me as if it was loose from its moorings. But—I didn't think you might want to hear about that. I thought perhaps you'd prefer the thing put on the basis of escape from a dull and small and more or less useless life. Into a big, full, useful one. That's why I began at that end of the proposition."

She began to laugh helplessly. "Forgive me.

I never in my life heard such a subject treated —in such a way."

"That's because you never met such a blundering, hair-trigger chap before. I'll admit I've given you reason to laugh at me—from your point of view."

"I'm not laughing at you. I'm really—not laughing at all.—I'm nearer crying. Because—I think you're sorry for me, and that's why——"

"It's not why. If I'm honest I'll admit that I don't in the least expect you to take me, on any terms, even to find yourself in a great place of service—which to me is the biggest thing anybody can be offered. It comes before—at least, *I* think it does—before any personal considerations. You see you could go over there alone, and try to find something to do, but it would be a long time before you could do it. If you went with me, I could train you all the way over, and I could make you useful right from the beginning."

"And you think I couldn't find a useful place in the world—unless I was married to you!"

"I didn't mean to say anything like that." His tone was rueful. "Of course not. I only meant—if I can put the thing a bit more clearly—that the things we're doing there seem to me so tremendously important that if you could be put into the midst of them without much loss of

time, you would have that much more time to serve."

"To serve—what? Are you talking about serving God, Dr. Gaysworthy?"

"I'm talking—in the clumsiest way possible—about serving humanity, which is the best way of serving God, of course. But I suppose I don't think so much about pleasing Him as of getting the job done for some poor chap who needs it. That's what takes hold of me—it takes hold of me so hard I can hardly wait to get back to my hospital. So—don't you see?—when you said you envied me—and you looked mighty unhappy to me as you said it—I thought instantly of this most effective way in the world of getting you a real job. And then," he added, more gravely, for he had been speaking with much spirit, "you showed me you thought the personal consideration ought to come first. So then I told you the truth—that I was asking you to do that because I cared such a lot for you that I thought I could do more to make you useful than anybody else could."

She was silent. This was the strangest thing that had ever happened to her, no doubt at all of that. It was not her first proposal of marriage, nor her second. It was most certainly the first time an offer of marriage made to her had been tied up with an offer of a "job"! And it was

plain that Dan Gaysworthy was perfectly serious in making the one thing secondary to the other. Yet—and this she couldn't help seeing clearly, and it was what took the sting out of the whole matter for her—he really did "care for her," as he put it, and undoubtedly cared far more than even he himself knew, with his—to her—almost fanatical ideas about being of service to humanity. She realized that his crowded life had left him little time for thoughts of women, but that he was most certainly thinking of one now.

"We must turn around here," she said suddenly, discovering by the sight of a familiar landmark that they were nearly two miles from the Court. They wheeled and started back, still in silence. Evidently Dan thought he had said enough, he was waiting for her answer.

They had covered one of the two miles back before she said a word. Then finally she spoke, slowly and clearly.

"I shouldn't have said I could think for a minute of such a wild thing—it seems to me a wild thing. But I have thought of it, all these minutes. There are two things in the way. I couldn't marry you without loving you, and I can't love you because—I lost the man I was engaged to, in the World War."

"And you're married to his memory?" He said it very gently, after a long pause.

"Perhaps not just that. But I never mean to marry unless I can feel again as I did toward him. I never expect to do that."

"No, I don't expect you ever will."

They went on in silence again, all the way back, and came in by way of the South gate. As they passed the house beside it Julia looked over at the lighted upper windows and a sigh escaped her lips. To her, ever since she had known them, Michael and Ann Paige had seemed to her very enviable. She felt at this moment singularly alone in the world.

When they reached the Court Dan spoke. "You can set this down as a queer experience," he said. "It is to me, too. Yet, somehow, I have a feeling that you'll think about it a good deal. I know I shall. I don't believe you'll find it's hurt the friendliness between us. I'll not speak of it again—until, perhaps, just before I go. I think I ought to give you another chance, don't you?—Oh, lord!—not at me, I don't mean that, you know I don't. But at that chance to live in a big place instead of a little one?"

He was smiling gravely down at her, and the light from the porch upon his face showed her some very fine outlines of both strength and sweetness. Odd he might be, genuine he was, and

she knew that she had been done a peculiar honour.

"Yes," she said. "I think you ought to give me a last chance, even though you know now what I'll say."

"I'll give it to you—just before I go."

They shook hands, and Julia went in. But she turned before she went, to watch the well-set-up figure striding down the driveway. Yes, she thought again, it was worth having come to Braithwaite Court, just to know Dan Gaysworthy.

XXXVI

DAN was in all Julia's thoughts. How could it be otherwise, in view of the situation as it had lain between them since the evening of the walk and talk upon the moonlit road, though it had never again been alluded to. Since that hour, though the two had been thrown together many times, especially throughout the early days of the Braithwaites' bereavement, Dan had made no further attempt to follow up his singular proposal with anything that could be construed as the pursuit of his object. Julia had wondered more than once whether he might possibly have regretted his rashness. And yet she couldn't believe that he would go away without carrying out his assertion that he would lay the plan before her again. What she would do with it when he should, she was unhappily sure. Whatever she might have thought of him as a suitor under different conditions, certain it was, in her own mind, that she could risk no such visionary ties as would be involved in marrying a man whose chief apparent purpose in inviting her to do so was to give her the chance to be of service in a world of woe.

Then, one late, grey afternoon, he came plunging after her on a narrow woodland path, its carpeting of brown pine needles wet with recent rain. It was a short cut from the village to the Court, and a favourite walk for Julia. Dan ranged up beside her.

"May I come along?"

She turned. "Yes, of course."

Her glance at him showed her a man tremendously alive. He always had given her the impression of one who lives faster than others, packs more into every hour. To-day a suppressed excitement seemed to be animating him. Dan didn't often show excitement; his energy was usually of the controlled sort, with no waste. At this minute he was electric, he gave off sparks.

"Breathing this air in good and deep? Makes one feel like a super-being, doesn't it?"

"You look like one, Dr. Gaysworthy. You look able to do anything in the world you set your hand to."

"I wish I were—there's so much to do, and so little time to do it in, before I go. And after I get there, such a terrific lot more to be done. . . . Julia, will you go back with me to help me do it?"

He had stopped short in the path to look at her. An unhappy little laugh broke from her.

"You are the strangest man——" she began.

He interrupted her. "That's what you said before."

"I know I did. I say it again."

He gazed at her. There was plenty of spirit in her glance at him, as there had been in her voice.

"Why?" he asked of her.

"Why!"

"I suppose I'm too abrupt. Yes, but you know there isn't much time to be anything but abrupt. I wasn't expecting to go just yet. Now, suddenly and unexpectedly, I have to. To-morrow. I'm badly needed over there. I haven't had a minute, since I got the cable, to do anything but rush about and pull wires, to reserve myself a place on the next ship sailing the Pacific. It happened to be one crowded to the hatches with a delegation—it was only two hours ago that I put the thing through. And now, I've a hundred things to see to. And to-morrow I'm off. This is my last chance for a few minutes alone with you. I've been trying for an hour to find you."

"And yet—" she spoke breathlessly—"you ask me if I am going with you. Do you expect me to answer that and then be ready to start with you to-morrow?"

"It could be done," he replied, dauntlessly. "If I couldn't get you on this ship, you could

follow me, in a fortnight. But I could get you on. I've friendly relations with the Captain and the purser—I know them of old. The purser'd make it possible, if he gave up his own quarters. They can always take one more—if they want to."

Julia turned away, walking on in silence, with Dan following closely. She felt as if she were in some sort of dream—one of the rushing, complicated sort, which catches the dreamer up and bears him along, helpless.

"You don't know how to answer me." His voice spoke at last. "Or—you do know, and hate to hurt me. You needn't fear that. I'm not expecting you to take me at my word. I suppose the whole plan really is queerer to you than anything you ever heard of, even though it seems rational enough to me. Probably you simply wouldn't dare to stake everything on one such throw. I've staked all I have so many times in my life, it doesn't seem risky to me to make any quick decision that I think may lead to something."

Suddenly she realized that she wasn't the only one who would risk much, provided she should agree to his proposal. He knew far less about her than she knew about him. How had he, with all his daring, dared this?

"Yes," she said steadily, "the whole plan *is*

queer to me. And you've been near me all this time, since that day when this was first spoken of, and have done nothing—even to further our acquaintance. If you really——"

He picked her up quickly: "If I really cared, I'd have come round and seen all I could of you? Why, that was why I couldn't come! You'd told me what the difficulty was with you. It was left that I'd just put the case to you once before I went, but my idea was that I wouldn't do a thing to persuade you meanwhile. Wasn't that the only fair thing? I've been trying to behave honourably. And besides"—and here was the most utter candour she could conceive of—"even before this summons came I've been busy every hour, trying to fill my kit with tools for my job. I was going anyway, you know, in a month more."

"Yes, that was it." It was she who now spoke quickly. "That's really all you think of, Dr. Gaysworthy. Taking me along is—to you—like taking one more tool in your kit. That's all. And of course—I can't go. Being a woman—I should have to have more than that. Being of service isn't enough for me, whatever it is to you."

He stood still again and looked at her. "I expected that answer," he said, after a minute. "Probably I deserved it. But—if it's assurance of my love for you that you want again—I've

loved you since the first hour I saw you. How could I help it? You're the most beautiful thing I've ever seen—the dearest creature I've ever known. . . . But—I've nothing—absolutely nothing to offer you. Not of the sort men want to give women. Worldly goods, a fine home, wealth, position—all of that. So to go with my love I can only offer you work—hard work—and all the time. Do you see why I have to put that first?—Because it's all there is!"

"Yes, it's all there is," she agreed, "from your point of view. I should be second in your thoughts, in your time, in—everything."

He nodded. "In so far as I could make you so. The other's *got* to be first. Probably you can't realize how it takes all my time—you'd have very little of that. So—you'd need to be as absorbed as I. If you were, it would be all right, for you'd feel as I do about it. Nothing would matter so you got things done. But—when we did meet——"

His smile promised something, no doubt of that. But it wasn't enough for her. She shook her head.

"I'm afraid I haven't the courage," she said. "Why, Dr. Gaysworthy, I'd never been out of my own state farther than Washington, when I came up here. I—oh, you can't conceive the impossibility of my leaping at a complete change

of everything like this. I—why, I just simply can't risk doing what might make us both frightfully unhappy, if it didn't work out as you think it would."

"I'm ready to take the chance of that. You're not. But I can't blame you, little Julia. I—and my work—are like a den of lions to you. I see. Of course I see. . . ." He looked away for a minute through the trees, with a touch of wistfulness on his face. Then he turned back. "So it's good-bye, I'm afraid. I won't have time to see you again—and it's better that way, anyhow."

They walked on silently, and came soon to the end of the narrow, leaf-strewn path through the woods which with one more bend would emerge into the open. The house was almost in view through the trees. Dan paused again.

In his face was a look of pain such as Julia had never seen there before. Pain—and longing. But his voice when he spoke was quiet and restrained.

"I know I seem strange to you," he said slowly. "You've said it, twice over. I suppose I *am* strange, in a way. But I'm like other men in this, at least—it takes all the will I have to leave you. If you knew how, at this minute, I'm tempted to try how I could make you want me as I want you, by——" He opened his arms with

a very human gesture, then quickly let them drop at his sides. "But that wouldn't be fair. You're lonely, and so am I. If we set each other on fire—well—it wouldn't be good enough, would it? If you went to Korea just for love of me—or I took you just for love of you——"

"Oh, you *are* a fanatic!" she cried, and turned away, her heart beating heavily. "Good-bye, Dan Gaysworthy."

She hurried away from him, down the path, around the bend, not looking back. He let her go, though at every moment she expected to hear him call, or to hear his rapid footsteps on the path behind her. And suddenly, because he hadn't followed her, because he had let her end it, she was sick with misery. But there seemed nothing left to do except to go into the house and close the door.

In that moment she knew that she had left outside the most vital thing that had ever come into her life. Nothing like it could ever be had for the taking, again.

XXXVII

"OH, DAN, dear—how I hate to let you go! It's been so jolly to have you again, like old times."

Ann Paige held her brother in a strangling embrace; it was the one outlet for her feelings, for she wouldn't cry over this parting—at least not while Dan was in sight.

"Yes, old girl—I know. It's been a great visit. You and Michael have been trumps to let me come and go this way, at all hours. Well——"

Dan hated good-byes. Best get them over as fast as possible. And that which he was leaving behind *this* time——

Michael next, wringing his hand, with a hand on his arm and a look of deep affection.

"Take care of yourself, Dan. And don't let it be too long before you come again."

Dan smiled, making no answer to this. He had no idea he would come back again for many years, unless summoned by some dire necessity.

Uncle Scar had come down with Charlton to say good-bye. Charlton himself was to motor Dan into town to his train. Ann wanted to go

too, but she knew Dan's peculiar aversion to being made a fuss over and waved out of sight. It didn't make much difference, anyhow—letting him go at all was the hard thing to do; it didn't help it to follow him to the steps of his train.

Julia Heath was not there to say good-bye. Charlton had proposed that she go down to the South gate with them, but she had thanked him and refused. Better not to see Dan Gaysworthy again, she said to herself, especially since it must be in the presence of other people. She had thought till the last minute that he might come to see her once more; when he did not she realized that he had accepted her decision as final. That was the way he made decisions himself.

When the two Braithwaites drove away, her gaze followed them. They were to see him again —she was not. Suddenly, she didn't know how to bear it that she was not to see him again.

"Dan—it's like parting with a son," said Uncle Scar unsteadily. "I don't know how you've managed to do it in so short a time. But you have." And he too wrung Dan's hand.

"Mr. Braithwaite, you're all too good to me. Why, I'm nothing to let go! See here—you'll all make me weak as water. If I had one gigantic pair of arms I'd hug you all in them together. Now—I'm off!"

But he wasn't. William and Lena, from the Court, burst out of the shrubbery.

"You'll excuse us, sir?" said William. "You've been that kind——"

And he and Lena respectfully shook Dan's hand. He put both his own over theirs, one after the other, touched to the quick. Then he shouted at Charlton:

"Come on! Hustle me away. Good-bye, everybody—take care of yourselves."

And Charlton mercifully whirled him off, out of the South gate, down the road toward Boston, leaving as many heavy hearts behind as there were people.

XXXVIII

A HALF-HOUR after Daniel Gaysworthy had gone, Julia Heath came out of her room. She had slipped into her street clothes; a heavy top-coat was on her arm. Her eyes, deep with mingled pain and excitement, looked out from under her little close black hat; she seemed ready for flight—as she was.

"Estelle, can I see Mrs. Braithwaite?"

"Madame ees asleep, Ma'm'selle Heath." Estelle's eyes narrowed with meaning.

"Never mind, then."

Julia ran downstairs. She had already ordered William and Mrs. Braithwaite's own motor. Uncle Scar had not returned to the house. There was no one to consult.

The moment they were off Julia said, low and urgently: "William, I *must* see Dr. Gaysworthy before he goes. I think there's time—there must be. They went well ahead of time for the train he's taking, I know."

"Yes, ma'am." Joyfully William let the motor out, little by little, as he dared, through the village which they reached in a minute or two

after leaving the South gate. "He wished to get away, I think, Miss Heath. He'd time to spare."

William thought he understood. He and Lena had figured it out, before this, that the doctor always knew when Miss Heath was around. They weren't so sure about her taking note of him. "But—you never can tell with a girl," Lena had said wisely. And William had agreed to that, out of his own experience.

Mile after mile—William knew how to drive! He never lost a chance for speed, if it were only for five rods. They covered the first ten miles in about as many minutes. Then traffic began to interfere, as always—only it seemed worse than ever before. They neared the outskirts of the city itself, William choosing his way with discretion—the least congested streets. Now they were in town; the difficulties increased. They were hindered by a suddenly stopped car ahead, with no warning; they lost a minute at a corner here, two minutes there. Julia's eyes were on her watch, her glove wrist pulled back—the time was getting short. And now, in spite of all William's foresight and care, they were caught in a traffic jam, which seemed to rise up out of the ground. A great truck in front of them had stalled; a trolley had stopped beside them—there was no way round, no possible turning. Other cars piled up instantly

in a long line behind them. Impatient horns shrieked.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," apologized William, breathing fast in the impatience which he had caught from his anxious passenger, though she hadn't bothered him by saying a word. "I can't get out of this. Maybe you'd better slip out and get a taxi on ahead. I'll come on and wait for you at the Station."

"I'll have to do that, William."

Julia slid out of the car, dived between the close-packed traffic, ran down the street, dodging people right and left who seemed doggedly to block her way. Queer, how she was for the second time within a few months rushing to catch a train at that great station. She had caught it before—she was going to lose it now. But she ran on, hoping and praying that that which never happened might happen to-day—a train would be late in leaving. She must see him—*she must see him!* How had she ever let him go?

"Get me to the South Station—quick!"

"Yes, ma'am. What train did you want to make?"

"Never mind—just *go!*"

"Yes, ma'am."

A taxi was a different vehicle from William's smooth motor. The gears crashed, the car slid

and bumped; but it got under way, and the driver took a dozen chances. Two minutes past the hour for the train's departure Julia was landed at the station. She rushed through it desperately, her breath coming short.

Nearing the exits, her eyes upon the empty space beyond it where lay the rails leading out, she all but ran into a figure coming back from the gate, through which it had just emerged from the train sheds.

"Why, Miss Heath!" Charlton Braithwaite's hat came off in an amazed sweep.

"Oh!" She looked at him dazedly, her eyes dark with disappointment, suddenly misty with tears. "The train's gone!"

"Just pulled out. Did you want—to catch it?" His eyes were scanning her face.

She tried to keep hold of her self-control, but her voice shook. "Yes. I've lost it."

"But—were you *going?* I didn't—why didn't you——?"

"I wanted to see Dr. Gaysworthy. I took the responsibility of having William bring me in. I —*had* to see him, Mr. Braithwaite."

"Then—you must—somehow. Let me think."

How quick he was—how kind! But what could he do? She knew he must have read her face—her despair at missing seeing Dan. That she might have seen him at the lifting of her

finger two hours ago and hadn't, was not a problem which he had to attempt to explain to himself now.

"We can send a wire to his train—stop him at Worcester—let you catch up—or bring him back. Shall I do that?"

"But he has a through ticket—must have—and just time to reach his ship."

"Oh, he must have a bit of leeway—he wouldn't cut it as close as that. And of course he'll come back if you want him. Though I think the better way would be for you to catch him up. It would delay him less."

"He'll lose his reservations," she said, hesitating, now that she realized what holding Dan over even a train might involve.

"Probably only to Chicago—he told me he was stopping over a few hours there on business with some hospital board. Shall I wire? I think you can get a train in an hour—a local, but it will take you to Worcester."

"Then—please do."

"Wait here," he told her promptly. "I'll get your ticket."

She walked up and down while she waited. It was a wild thing to do, she was well aware—and yet, it seemed to her the only thing. She couldn't explain it, but not even when the news had come that her fiancé had died in France had she felt

such a sense of desolation as that which had enshrouded her from the moment that she knew Dan had gone, not to return. This was a bigger thing than that—she knew it now! To let him sail without her wasn't possible—she couldn't bear it.

Charlton came back with her ticket and a railway timetable. He made her sit down and sat beside her, showing her the possibilities ahead for Dan if he waited over a train.

"He'll be in Chicago only four hours later," he explained. "So you needn't feel anxious about delaying him."

"What did you say in the telegram, please?" she asked.

"'*Miss Heath anxious to see you. Please stop off Worcester, meet next train from Boston.*' And signed it myself. I thought I'd better tell him who was coming, not to make him think anything had happened to his sister."

"Will it surely reach him?"

"I don't see how it can miss him." He didn't smile—didn't feel like smiling. It was more to him than Julia had any notion, that she should be dashing after Dan Gaysworthy with a face of such unhappy eagerness. It could mean but one thing, he said to himself—she was lost to the Court. What should they do without her? Nevertheless, there was only one thing for him

to do, to prove his friendship for them both. His heart was very sore over the loss of Dan from his own unhappy life.

He filled in the hour of waiting with one device after another. He bought her papers and a magazine, though he hadn't the least idea she would look within any of them. He walked with her about the station, more or less in silence.

Finally he put her on her train, shook hands with her, wished her luck with a smile, and jumped off realizing that he'd give a good deal to exchange places with the man she was following. He had no more satisfactory explanation, in his own mind, of her action, than that some misunderstanding had occurred between the two, which Julia couldn't rest till she had put right. It was like a woman, he reflected, to do something deliberately and then to want to undo it with no deliberation at all.

XXXIX

A "LOCAL" is probably the most maddening means of transportation known to an impatient passenger. Its comparatively slow rate of speed, its long stops, its air of unhurried leisure—Julia felt as if, while her body sat in the car, her real self were poised in air invisibly, a rod or two ahead of the crawling train, vainly beckoning it on—crying to it, "Hurry!—Hurry!" But though it didn't hurry, it did, in due time, pull itself into the station at Worcester.

She got up, her pulses hammering wildly. He would be just outside, standing at the steps, his hat off, his face lifted. The thought of seeing that arresting face again, of meeting his eyes, of hearing his voice, made her shaky. What would he say? Would he show that he was glad? She would know—she would know—exactly how he felt about it, in the first glance.

She went along into the vestibule, her eyes seeking in the small group of people on the platform the figure she expected to see. At the same time a sudden panic seized her. Suppose Charlton's wire hadn't reached him? Yet how could it fail to reach him? Again and again, as she jour-

neyed, in her imagination she had heard the call of the porter, or a messenger, going through the train—"Dr. Gaysworthy—Dr. Gaysworthy!" And had seen Dan, looking up from his paper, lifting his hand and beckoning the man, his eyes apprehensive. Reading it: *"Miss Heath anxious to see you."* What would that mean to him? It must mean one thing. She wouldn't venture to delay him on this most important setting forth for the other side of the world for anything less than her vital decision to go with him. To go with him—was that what she meant to do? To go on—not to go back? Could such a thing be accomplished decently? But her mind refused, each time she reached this point, to travel beyond it. It must all be left until she had seen him.

She came down the steps of the car into the group waiting to meet friends or to board the local. Her first hasty glance about the platform showed her no face she knew. Her startled gaze swept down its full length; she caught no glimpse of a familiar figure hurrying toward her. What had happened? Had he not received the message? Or had he, feeling himself unable to delay, sent a return message which she couldn't receive until she reached home? Whatever had happened, the appalling fact remained —he was not there. For it was quite unthinkable that, if he had left his fast train to meet her

slow one, he should have been anywhere when it came in except upon the platform, ready to assure her that she hadn't mistaken his willingness to change his plans to suit hers. He couldn't do less, however he really felt. He was bound to appreciate her sensitiveness at such a moment.

He was not there. She went on into the station, to look about carefully on the chance that he had somehow been delayed in getting outside. She didn't expect to find him there, and this conviction was at once confirmed. The place might have been empty of all life, the faces about her were all such blanks to her blinded vision. What had happened? There was but one thing to think. The message had somehow failed of delivery, and his train was speeding on, carrying him away, unconscious of her wild desire which strained after him now with all the force there was in her.

Well—there was nothing more, it seemed to her, that she could do. Fate had decided for her. She had let him go, and he had gone, beyond her reach. She hadn't dared to stretch out her empty hands and fill them with this big thing that had been offered her, and now it was too late. It was unimaginable that she should try again to stop him while she followed him farther. She hadn't enough money with her—to be

practical about it—to more than carry her back to Braithwaite Court.

She sat down in the most inconspicuous corner she could find and forced herself to study her time-table, to find out when she could return. Her eyes blurred, her mind refused to fasten itself upon such details of figure and line. "A. M.—P. M.——" which was it? She had forgotten time—she actually didn't know whether it was now morning or afternoon. Four o'clock—the station clock informed her. She made it out at last that there was a train back at five-forty. No—wait—that train was in light-faced type—a morning train. Here was another—in dark type. No—there was a star against it—Sundays only. Finally she found it. She had three hours to wait—but it would be an express when it came. She should be at the Court by ten o'clock that evening.

As she waited it was borne in upon her that she had been a fool. What man would want a woman who didn't know her own mind? He would say—and justly—that if she didn't want him before he went, she didn't want him now—she was only actuated by that commonest of all human impulses, to desire that which can't be had, that which is suddenly withdrawn. She was a vacillating creature, as unfit as possible to be

the wife of a man so definite and positive in all his thoughts and actions that he hewed to one line as a woodman cuts down a tree—every blow telling in the same spot.

Julia was very unhappy now—with a doubled unhappiness which amounted to torture. She sat in her corner, her eyes still mechanically watching, but with the certainty that they would not find the object of their search. Many curious glances were cast upon her—hers was the sort of personality that interests, the more that she herself was so evidently oblivious to all scrutiny. Becoming aware, at length, of various tentative approaches, she got up and went outside the station into the street, walking about the square, and finally, conscious of intense fatigue unaccompanied by hunger, going into the lunch room and calling for a cup of tea. She drank thirstily, realizing that she needed the support.

After what seemed an interminable interval, her train came in. The trip back was accomplished more quickly than she could have imagined, being now dully indifferent as to what happened next. So presently she was making her way through the South Station again, to buy her ticket for the local train that would take her to within a mile and a half of Braithwaite Court. She could walk the rest of the way.

A voice spoke at her side—a respectful and

very pleasant voice—that of William, the chauffeur:

"Miss Heath, the car's here. I'm to take you back."

She turned, amazed. "Why, William, how did you know?"

"Mr. Braithwaite, ma'am. He fixed it for me to wait—he thought you'd come by this train. He said you'd be very tired, ma'am."

"Oh, William—I am! I'm so glad to have the car. But I can't understand——"

"Mr. Braithwaite said I was to tell you he found out the telegram wasn't delivered. He was very sorry. They got the name wrong. When he found out, the train was long past Worcester, but he sent another explaining about the first one. I'm sure it wasn't his fault, Miss Heath," added William earnestly. "If you'll excuse me, I'll say he was cut up about it, wanting to be of use to you."

"Yes—thank you, William."

She knew William was "cut up" too, that anything had gone wrong for her. He was as faithful a friend, in his way, as anyone she knew. She had liked his honest face and pleasant ways ever since she had been at the Court; she understood and sympathized with his manly affection for Lena. She followed him now to the waiting car with the sense of being taken care of, which

above all things she needed at the moment. The very way in which he put her in, and tucked the heavy motor robe about her, showed her how sorry he was for whatever had sent her on this futile journey. It was a comfort. As for Charlton's thoughtfulness for her, even that was hardly more warming than the gentle kindness of this servant.

XL

"I'M very glad to see you safely back, Miss Heath."

"Thank you, Mr. Braithwaite. And I appreciate so much your allowing William to stay in for me. When I went away I hadn't the least idea of being gone till so late."

Charlton Braithwaite had met her at the entrance when the car stopped, and was attending her into the house with what struck Julia as more than his ordinary courtesy, though he had never failed to show her every kindness. She thought he looked unusually worn to-night. The once florid face had lost its heavier contours and colourings since the death of little Alfred. Of late it had taken on a harried look, as of troubles and anxieties increasing. She couldn't wonder. As he spoke again his voice showed perturbation.

"I know you must be tired—I'm very sorry to trouble you with any duties to-night. But, late as it is, my wife insists on seeing you."

Julia, meeting his troubled eyes, tried to answer lightly, though her heart sank at thought of encountering Mrs. Braithwaite in one of her moods to-night, at the end of what had proved,

with its excitement and its disappointment, an exhausting day.

"That's quite all right, of course. Shall I go to her or am I to go to my room first?"

"If you don't mind too much," he said reluctantly, "I think it might be best not to keep her waiting. She began at noon to ask for you, and has grown—excited. I hope—if she seems unreasonable or—unkind—you'll remember how really ill she is."

"Of course I'll remember, Mr. Braithwaite. She isn't well—and I'm so sorry. Please don't be anxious. I went away to-day without her consent; perhaps she needed me badly."

"It wasn't a real need." But he said no more, accompanying her to the door of Beatty's room and knocking, then opening it for her. Afterward she was sure that he had not gone a step away.

Beatty was not in bed, as Julia had expected. In the trailing silks and laces of an elaborate, high-coloured negligee, such as she affected, her hair showing disordered edges under a French bandeau sewn with small flowers which to Julia's eyes looked absurdly silly, she was pacing up and down her room. Her face was of an unhealthy pallor, her eyes were glittering with anger. The instant she saw her secretary she seemed literally to pounce upon her.

"Well—at last!" she cried.—Beatty was always melodramatic at such times.—"You deign to come and explain yourself, do you? I didn't expect it. Do tell me—how do you happen to take the trouble? It must have put you out terribly!"

Even for Beatty, this was a more than usually rude beginning. But Julia, conscious that she unquestionably did owe her employer an apology, and determined not to let the interview become more stormy than she could prevent, answered evenly:

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. Braithwaite. But you were sleeping when I went away. I had to go in a very great hurry, and I hadn't the least idea that I shouldn't be back by two in the afternoon. You seldom want me before then."

"Oh, I don't! How do you know when I'm going to want you? Your time is mine, isn't it?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Braithwaite."

"Then you have no business to go off without permission, have you?"

"It was an emergency." Julia's voice was quiet, but her eyes were becoming fiery.

"Even so, you have to have my permission, you know. You can't be mistress here—though I've no doubt you would be quite acceptable to the master of this house. Possibly more so than myself."

Her tone was sneering—it would have been unendurable from any but a woman whom Julia considered more or less unbalanced. Even so, the speech couldn't be ignored.

"If I have offended you, Mrs. Braithwaite, I regret it very much. But even though you employ me as your secretary, I'm not your servant in the sense that you can command every moment of my life or say such things to me as you've just said. If you feel you can—then——"

"Then you'll resign, will you?" Beatty came up to Julia where she stood, and her voice shook. "Yes, you're scared. And you may well be. You've tried to make yourself the mistress of this house and everybody in it. How do I know but you've gone further than that? It looks like it, when my husband's so anxious to please you he sends you off for a day in town in my car. Very likely he went with you—or met you there. He wasn't here——"

"Mrs. Braithwaite!" Julia's dark head was up, her eyes were black with sudden fury, but she still controlled her voice. "You can't say that sort of thing to me—as your secretary. I do resign, at this moment. You will excuse me. I'm going to my room now." And she went quickly toward the door.

"Oh, lawsy!" Beatty flung herself toward Julia, following her, her manner changing in an

instant from insolence to petulance. "What's the use of being so touchy? I don't suppose he was with you—you needn't be so frightfully offended. He doesn't think much about women these days. All he does is to mope like a sick boy. You can't blame me if I don't like to have people off somewhere when I want them. I'm ill—I have to have what I want when I want it. I'm dying of nerves—nerves! You might be decently sorry for me instead of standing there like an angry princess. I'm not responsible—I simply can't stand it when—when—things—happen to upset me. I go crazy—something breaks inside my poor head. *Oh-h-h!*"

It was the old hysteria which had her now, as she rushed away again to throw herself face downward across her bed, sobbing violently. Julia, who had continued to move across the room toward the door, paused at this outbreak. She knew well enough that it was Beatty's old trick to secure attention, but she also knew that such manifestations are dangerous for any woman. Since she had known of Beatty's reckless drug-taking Julia had been anxious lest in one of her wild moods she might do herself an injury. The younger woman, in her plain, dark street clothes, stood looking across at the figure on the bed, in its tumbled bright finery. She was longing to walk away and leave Mrs.

Charlton Braithwaite and never see her again. Whether, in the peculiar circumstances, she was justified in this course, she could not be sure.

As she stood there, weariness and wretchedness seemed besieging her. She ached from head to foot with the nervous tension of the futile day just past. Her face had grown very pale under Beatty's abuse; she had never been so angry.

The door beside her opened, and Charlton came in. He too looked weary and unhappy, and angry as well—his feeling seemed to be very nearly the counterpart of hers. Somehow, she knew that he had been listening—and if he had, she felt that he had done so because he feared for her that she might need his intervention. He did not look at her as he entered, but softly closed the door and crossed over to the bed.

"Beatty, dear," he said, in an extraordinarily firm tone, "you must stop this and let Miss Heath go. You're exciting yourself for nothing. It's almost midnight."

Beatty rolled over upon the bed and lay staring up at him. Her sobs suddenly ceased with that peculiar effect one notes in a child who stops a violent outcry upon having its attention diverted. She drew herself up to a half-sitting posture, propped by her arm. Then she began to laugh wildly. Charlton frowned heavily—he

looked distraught himself, as if he wanted to put his hands over his ears. The laughter sounded worse than the crying, as it must when there is no cause for laughter.

"Oh!" she cried. "You come to her defence, do you? Quite the usual scene, isn't it? We three'd do nicely as a scene for the drama. 'The Eternal Triangle!' The wife, the husband, the wife's charming secretary—misunderstood, for no reason at all, of course. Injured innocence—that's her part. The wife gets no sympathy from the audience—she's a fool. The husband—oh! he's a hero—a perfect man. Of course he hates his wife and adores the secretary——"

"Beatty!" Charlton's hand came down upon her bare shoulder, from which the silk and lace had slipped away. He let go of it instantly, as if he didn't like to touch it; instead he laid hold of her arm where it was covered. "Please go, Miss Heath," he begged, without looking around.

"She shan't go!" Beatty's voice rose again. "Don't you dare go, Julia Heath! Come here! You know well enough—well enough—" here she began to sob again, in a way utterly irresponsible—"know well enough—I say all kinds of things when I'm in this state. I told you—I don't know what I say. You can't go—I've got to have you. Come here—don't stand there like an ice-

berg. Oh, I haven't anybody—anybody in the world—who cares for me!"

Julia came quickly. "Mrs. Braithwaite," she said steadily, "if you'll wait till morning, when you're feeling better, we'll finish this—talk. I'm going now. Good-night."

"You said you'd resigned. Tell me you haven't. I must know that—to-night."

Julia hesitated. Not because she was uncertain of her ultimate course, even though she no longer expected to see Daniel Gaysworthy again; but because, though she didn't look toward him, she knew that Charlton Braithwaite was silently begging her to stay. Who else, she knew he was thinking, could fill this difficult place, if she withdrew? Certainly no stranger, knowing nothing of the conditions, would remain after her first experience with her employer's exasperatingly insolent manner.

"I can tell you nothing more to-night. Please excuse me," Julia said, after the instant's deliberation. Then she went across the room to the door, opened it, and closed it behind her, followed by outcries which rose piercingly upon the still air of the house. She hurried away to her room.

She had hardly shut the door upon herself when she heard the familiar thump of a blackthorn stick outside, and a knock upon the heavy

mahogany panel. Whatever might have brought Mr. Scarborough Braithwaite to her, she opened the door to him with a sense of relief.

"I just wanted to say, my dear," said the old man, without entering, his eyes sharp under their bushy brows studying her, "that I've heard a good deal of all this, and I know what it's all about. Beatty's a sick woman, but you're not called upon to share any more trouble of ours. I thought maybe you'd sleep better if you knew how I felt about it."

She smiled at him, a wave of colour coming into her white face. "Oh, you're so good," she answered impulsively. "I *am* glad to know how you feel about it. I'm terribly sorry about Mrs. Braithwaite's continued illness, but I'm leaving in the morning. Mr. Braithwaite, I feel I really must. I'm afraid I'd leave to-night if I could."

"I'd even help you to that," he said cheerfully, though his own heart was heavy—heavier than hers, because he was old and there were few chances left in life for him to win through such days as these to brighter ones, "if it would be any use to you to get away before morning. I know you'd like to go—I don't wonder. But the best thing for you now is to get some sleep. Good-night, my dear child."

She put her hand in his and looked gratefully at him. It came into her mind, suddenly, that he

might know of what had happened during the past day—that his sympathy was based on such knowledge. Yet, how could it be? No, he merely was a shrewd observer, had understood that her position in the household had become more and more difficult with Beatty's increasing unreasonableness, and that to-night it had reached a tragic crisis. She said good-night to him with a warm sense of his friendliness. He was the one person in the house whom it would be hard to leave behind.

XLI

UNCLE SCAR was the first person whom Julia saw in the morning. She rose very early—only the maids were astir when she came down. As yet her plans were incomplete; she meant to go to see Ann Paige before she fully formed them. If Ann would take her in for a day, till she could think out what to do, could wire her brother Dale and receive an answer, that would help. One thing was certain in her mind—there was nothing more to do about Daniel Gaysworthy. She could not now reach him or stop him. He had not replied to Charlton's second telegram, and, though reason told her he could not have failed to do so if he had received it, the absence of a word from him was hard to understand. As to sending a letter after him, to be received when he should have arrived at his Korean hospital, to tell him that she would follow him there—no, her imagination refused to deal with such a possibility. If she could have seen him, talked with him, discovered both the real reaction of his mind and her own now that they had parted—that would have been a different matter. But as it was . . .

Her trunk was packed; it seemed to her that if she could get into the outer air she could breathe more freely and decide upon her immediate course with a better chance of being wise about it. As she came down the imposing staircase into the great lower hall, it was to see Mr. Scarborough Braithwaite sitting in one of the high-backed, carved chairs that flanked the entrance—an extraordinary resting place for him, was Julia's first thought. Was he waiting for her?

As he caught sight of her he rose, replacing his watch in his pocket. He came forward to meet her.

"Ah, my dear," he said, "in another ten minutes I should have gone up and rapped upon your door. Time flies, and I have a plan to set before you. Suppose we come in here and talk about it."

His manner was somehow a shade different from the usual; it was as if he were still a man of pressing affairs and had important business on hand. He looked younger, more alert, more erect —or was it her stirred imagination? In the sombre, half light of the place into which he led her, a little room beside the entrance door in which messengers waited and small business was transacted, his keen old eyes scanned her.

"Please sit down. I'm going straight to the point, because there's no time to lose."

Wondering, she sat down, and he drew up a chair to face her.

"I'm an old man," he said, "but I haven't lost my zest for putting through important transactions. I didn't sleep much last night—probably not much more than you did—thinking about what I could do for you in this crisis. I happen to know it is a crisis—and I hope you don't mind my knowing that. Perhaps you'll want to know how I know. I'll tell you. Dan told me."

Julia stared at him, startled. Just hearing Dan's name could do that to her now.

"You'll not blame him," he went on. "I've grown very fond of him, and he seemed to care a good deal about me. We've had a number of good talks, first and last. Before he left we had one last one. He had a good many things on his mind—we discussed them all. How Charlton was going to get on—what was to become of Beatty—how Michael and Ann would work out ways and means, and so on. Then—he came to you. He told me he'd asked you to marry him and go back with him, and that you'd refused. He—was pretty unhappy about it. Mostly at losing you, but partly because he thought he'd

done the thing in a way that had hurt you—made you think him all for efficiency and little for romance. I want to tell you now, for him, my dear —it wasn't so. He loved you so much he was quite off his head with grief over it. He let me see that—he couldn't help it. Yet—he seemed to have a queer idea that there was nothing more he could do about it. Either you went with him —or you didn't—that settled it. You'd refused —and he was going back to do his work. He said good-bye to me and told me that, if I'd look after you in every way I could, it would be the biggest thing I could do for him. So—that's why I got up early this morning."

His smile was a very beautiful thing to see. If she had been of his own flesh and blood of the second generation, his look couldn't have had in it more of an entirely worthy fondness and devotion. She was still staring at him, breathlessly. But suddenly, as by the merciful application of a cooling remedy, the worst of her own feverish pain was gone.

"I have a little plan, as I told you," he went on. "It's an old saying that opportunity knocks only once at one's door, and then passes on forever. But this time—she's come back to knock again at yours. Tell me, Julia Heath. If you could catch up with Dan Gaysworthy *now*—now that he's 'way beyond your reach—would

you go on with him? Marry him and go on? Before you answer that, let me tell you how I feel about him. I ought to be a judge of men—I've been in pretty close contact with them all my life. I want you to understand this: I've never seen one I liked better or trusted more."

He was silent now, waiting for her to speak. When she did, it was with her eyes on his. "Neither have I," she said simply.

"Would you marry him?"

She nodded. "Yes."

"Good!" He nodded back. "Well, then. He happened to mention that he was staying over a day in Chicago—some hospital affairs, some famous surgeon he wanted to see. I don't know where, so we can't reach him there without trying to do detective work at long distance. And I don't know what train he's leaving on. I know nothing except the name of the ship he's sailing on, and that he has one day's leeway in Seattle. But—we have time to reach him before he sails—if we start now. Shall we do it?"

"Shall *we* do it! You mean—you can't mean——"

"But I do. Why shouldn't I go along? And take Michael and Ann Paige. I can have my private car tacked on behind all the fastest trains across the continent——"

"Your private car!"

He laughed. "My dear, I haven't made much use of one for ten years now, but for many years I made my trips in no other way. You see—I'm still more or less connected with—quite a railway system. It's a simple matter for me to request a car put in shape for me. In fact—I've already done so. It will be waiting at the tail of the 10:02 this morning. Think Michael and Ann can be ready by that time? The trip might give the writer a bit of fresh material. As for Ann—she'd be company for you while you're making the journey to meet your future husband."

But in spite of these wonders there was one question she must have answered before she agreed to this astonishing proposal.

"Did you know," she asked, her young eyes going very deeply into his old ones with the poignancy of her feeling, "that I tried to catch Dan yesterday and failed? That I wired him and he didn't answer? We learned too late that he missed the telegram,—the operator made a mistake in the name, so it wasn't Dan's fault. But another wire was sent, and it seemed to me it must get to him in the end—and he would answer. If he doesn't——"

Uncle Scar shook his head. "One thing is absolutely certain: if he got it he would answer. If he doesn't answer it's because he didn't re-

ceive it. In any case—he'd have only one answer, Julia."

"You're sure of that?"

"As sure as if he'd been my own son and I'd known him all my life. Why—you're not doubting *that?"*

She couldn't doubt it, in the face of Uncle Scar's assurance. But the next thing was to be very sure that, in accepting this great favour—a favour to her so great that the mere thought of what it involved of expense to her benefactor was overwhelming to one who didn't possess the price of a mere ticket across the continent—she wasn't accepting too much.

"Can I take all this—from you?" She considered it, knitting her lovely brows. "It's such a big thing to let you do for me."

Again his smile settled the matter, backed by his simple words.

"Why," he said, "you can't deny me the pleasure of it. I haven't had such a chance at a great trip since the year I raced against time to Dallas, Texas, to get to a stockholders' meeting, with my pocket full of proxies, and put through an important deal with a rival railroad. That *was* a race, I promise you—we had all the engineers on the road betting on the run. And we made it—with twenty minutes to spare—twenty min-

utes!" He chuckled. "It would have been more fun if the shave had been closer."

She had to laugh with him, his enjoyment was so evident both in that race of the past and the proposed one of the present.

"Of course," he added when the laugh was over, "we could wire Dan at his ship and hold him over for the next one. But I know how anxious he is to get back, and we don't want to do the thing that way. We want to meet him with a little time to spare to send you two off properly. And—once more, my dear adopted niece—you need have no possible fear as to how he's going to take this. *I know!*"

XLII

"MICHAEL PAIGE, don't you think maybe we're dreaming?"

Ann, with her husband, was pacing up and down the station platform at St. Paul. A half-hour stop while the car was switched to the rear of another train than that which had brought them from Chicago gave a much-needed chance for the travellers to get out, exercise their muscles, and breathe in the clear cool air of the autumn morning.

"Yes, I think we are," Michael replied. "But I don't intend to wake up. A gorgeous dream like this, happening just as I'd made up my mind I couldn't write another word before November if we starved, is a dream to stay in. So don't pinch me."

"The idea I can't get away from," Ann went on, pacing swiftly along as one who thoroughly enjoys the sensation of locomotion, "is the anticipation of the sight of Dan's face. You know, even though he asked Julia Heath to marry him, I don't suppose he really had the least idea she would. He's never thought anything could

happen to him except work, and more work. There wasn't any question about his falling in love with her. I know—I saw when it happened. But dear old Dan would never think of himself except as a poor bargain for any woman. Whereas——"

"You think of him as a rich treasure. So do I. Anyhow, the inevitable alloy in him improves him, I'd say. These perfect men——"

"There aren't any, dear. And of course Dan is far from perfect,—or even clever in such matters—so far that he's made all kind of blunders in this experience with Julia."

"It wasn't an experience, Ann—it was an episode—an incident—a mere casual contact." Michael was chuckling as he blew clouds of pipe smoke into the keen air. "It was a passing wave of the hand to a fellow human being as he flew over her head in a plane: *'Come on up—the air's fine to-day!'* Well, I'd mistakenly supposed women had to be courted, cajoled, heckled into marrying. I certainly had to use all those methods with you, Ann. Your brother's worked out a different theory. *'Come on!'* says he. And she comes. It's great stuff to be in on."

"Michael, you sha'n't. You don't know what passed between them, nor how much they saw of each other."

"Precious little. Couldn't. He was away nine tenths of his time."

"But he's the sort who can pack a lot into an hour. Somehow he did the trick, not she. She's not the kind to run after any man."

"She's doing it now."

Ann pinched his arm savagely. "I'm ashamed of you, Michael Paige. It's Uncle Scar who's doing the running, with Julia tucked under his arm. And it's because he sees that they ought to be brought together before it's too late. Hush—they're coming."

"Hush, yourself," Michael whispered back enjoyingly. "I tell you, the grand old man's having the time of his life out of this."

Uncle Scar looked it. He had been having a beautiful time all the way across the country. As in past days of his long and active life, his word had been law everywhere. Railway officials had come on board at important stops to shake hands with him; messengers had arrived with telegrams; at his wave of the hand locomotive engineers whose hair was beginning to show grey got down out of their cabs and came to him, grinning, and wiping their hands on their greasy blue jeans.

"You see," he said modestly, when his guests expressed their wonder at his wide acquaintance

in this, to them, alien world, "it's only about ten years since I stopped racketing over the country in my own car. That's why a crack engineer like Eagan there remembers me. Gad! He can get more speed out of his engine without running past signals than any man I know."

This journey was to Julia an unprecedented experience. In the luxurious little combined library and writing room she sat at a small desk and wrote a letter to Dale, stopping now and then to gaze out at the autumn landscape which streamed past the wide, spotlessly clean window.

"Dale, dear, I really can't believe in this, at all. Julia Heath, a little Southerner who has known nothing of the world beyond the gates of her home until she went to Richmond to learn stenography, and shocked her friends by daring to take a position—is off upon this wild adventure. For it is a wild one, I suppose, and I know you will think so. But, somehow, however it ends, I shall have had these wonderful days to remember. It's not the pomp and circumstance of making the journey in this way—a mode of travelling which belongs only to the rich—that means so much to me. It's the being with 'Uncle Scar' as if I belonged to him. I never knew anybody—except Dan—who had such an effect upon me. Why, if Dan doesn't want me, I could

almost be contented to go back with Uncle Scar. No, I couldn't. But—let me tell you something.

"I didn't realize how enormously rich and powerful Mr. Scarborough Braithwaite had been—and still is—till I saw him on this journey. This sort of thing is an everyday matter to him. And he's so simple and nice about it all. Shakes hands with a grimy locomotive engineer just as enjoyingly as he does with the president of the railroad. More than one of those has come on board to greet him, to say nothing of the governor of one state, and other distinguished men. I didn't know how they knew he was coming, but Mr. Paige seems to think it's easily accounted for; he says it's always known instantly when a man of his position sets out on a hurry trip from coast to coast. Well—so long as they don't know his errand!

"A little thing happened last evening which lets in much light on his character. We'd had a charming evening, all together, and had just said good-night. I lingered to talk with Ann Paige for perhaps ten minutes, then went to my stateroom—or thought I did. Somehow I was turned around—we'd just been switched at a junction, and our car was temporarily headed in the opposite direction from the usual. I opened the door of Uncle Scar's stateroom instead of my own. I discovered it instantly and softly closed

the door, but not before I'd caught a glimpse of the old man on his knees before his berth, saying his prayers! No, he's not a saint, Dale. I've heard him swear roundly more than once at some delay of ours; and I imagine he's been a terror as well as a genius at railroad affairs, in his time. But, just the same, that sight of him wasn't out of the picture. I shouldn't wonder a bit if he were saying: *'God bless Michael and Ann and Julia, and help us catch Dan in time. God bless everybody and make me a good boy,'* just as I've no doubt he used to do.

"We shall be in Seattle to-morrow night. And the ship is due to sail at noon. Do you wonder I'm excited?"

XLIII

AFTER it was over, this dash across the continent was recalled to Julia not so much by its high lights as by its low ones, but these were of themselves literally full of colour. There were the snowy linen cloths on the small tables brought in at meal times; the hanging glass vase on the window frame, always filled with fresh, bright-hued flowers; the pleasant combination of dull blue velvet and brown walnut of the car's furnishings. Then the interested and attentive negro waiter; the smiling elderly porter who wanted to do everything for everybody; the coming on board of daily papers and telegrams at almost every stop; the brisk walks on station platforms. She remembered especially Michael Paige's notebook, always being pulled out for some notation; Ann's straight blue suit of camel's hair; Uncle Scar's fur-lined overcoat. The days passed swiftly—more swiftly than Julia would have thought possible. They had left Chicago in the middle of a dull morning, with a sleety rain falling. At noon next day they were far toward the real West, and their

train was running through brilliant sunshine, clear and cold.

And now it was Wednesday, only the third day since Chicago, and at ten in the morning they were leaving Spokane, less than six hours from Seattle, and Julia was packing into her black leather case the few belongings she had brought with her. There would be half a day in Seattle before the sailing of the *President Grant.* Ann Paige had offered to do any possible shopping for her. But Julia steadily refused to make any plan beyond the hour of seeing Dan.

"He may look sorry to see me, you know," she had said to Ann.

Ann had looked her straight in her darkly blue eyes and had smiled at her like a sister. "You may persist in feeling that way, dear," she said, "but Uncle Scar and Michael and I know we're betting on a sure thing. I see myself now, rushing from counter to counter to-morrow morning buying for a runaway bride. It will be the best fun I ever had."

The train drew into the great station at Seattle.

"We're going straight to the pier," Mr. Braithwaite had decreed. He had them in a cab before they could turn around.

"Sure you can get on board?" Michael asked —but not because he doubted. They all knew

now that doors flew open, trains dashed, messages speeded at the behest of this magician; there would be no question of being stopped at a gangplank for lack of credentials.

"Yes, I think I can get on board," replied Uncle Scar. By now he was looking ten, fifteen years younger than when he started on this journey; they had all observed it.

"*He* won't be on board," Michael urged. "Not eighteen hours before sailing time."

"No. But it's the only way to get trace of him. And he might be there," said Uncle Scar. They made up their minds that he somehow knew.

A rubicund ship's officer stood before the party, natty in blue and gold. "Yes, the purser could tell you," he answered the question of the impressive looking old gentleman whom he recognized as the head of the group. People always did seem to know this of Uncle Scar. "But I can tell you myself." He seemed suddenly to decide to be communicative. "Dr. Gaysworthy's on board, but you can't see him now. A queer thing's happened. He and the ship's surgeon are operating on a patient. It's being done on board because the man's determined to sail—in fact, he's got to sail, and get across—if he lives. He's one of the owners of the line. So, you see, I can't call your friend."

"How does Dr. Gaysworthy come to be operating?" inquired Uncle Scar, with deep interest.

"Because Mr. Holmquist insisted upon it. They crossed together, coming this way. And met, two hours ago, ready to go back—strange enough it was, too. Mr. Holmquist was just beginning to be ill; half an hour afterward he was so bad he got hold of Dr. Gaysworthy and put himself in his hands. Now—they're fixing things up in there—in the suite that's Mr. Holmquist's."

Uncle Scar turned to Julia. He spoke in an aside, but Ann caught it, and afterward told it gleefully to Michael.

"His eyes were twinkling like stars," she said. He leaned over and whispered to her: "All doubts as to whether Dan can find room for you on board are ended. Whatever he wants he can have of the owner, after that operation!"

Dr. Daniel Gaysworthy came out of the large and well-appointed stateroom in which he had been at work at his old trade. He wore a white linen gown, considerably besplashed, which belonged to the ship's surgeon and was rather too small for Dan. His bare arms were red with scrubbing, his hair lay plastered damply upon his forehead above his tired eyes. It had been

an unexpectedly difficult case, with unforeseen complications which had taxed his ingenuity.

The ship's surgeon had left the stateroom some time earlier, but Dan had stayed with his fingers on a pulse whose action hadn't quite suited him. He had by now become satisfied with it, and had seen his patient far enough out of the anæsthetic to be able to stare dazedly up at his operator and to receive with some degree of comprehension the assurance: "All over—everything's fine," upon which he had slid comfortably back under the lingering effects of the ether and dozed off again. So then Dan had slipped away, leaving the patient with his nurses.

He made for his own stateroom, opened the door. He confronted his sister Ann. She rose, smiling, to meet him. Then he saw Julia Heath.

"Don't stare so hard, dear," murmured Ann in his ear, with her arms about his neck. "We're quite real. How you do reek of ether! But we don't mind, really."

Over her shoulder he was looking at Julia.

He seemed speechless. But into his face had leaped the look she wanted to see—of amazement, incredulity, turned to welcome—such a welcome. Her question was answered by the flame of joy in his eyes.

He put Ann aside somewhat as if he didn't

know exactly what he was doing, and Ann had the grace to laugh contentedly.

"Yes, I know, Danny dear," she said. "But don't you think you'd better get that abominable gown off first?"

He presented his back to her. "For heaven's sake untie it!" he cried, and Ann obeyed, still laughing. When it was loose, he let it fall to the floor and kicked it into a corner. Then he took two strides to Julia—and Ann went out and closed the door.

Without a word he opened his arms and she came into them. He bent his head and rested his cheek against her hair. To this day the smell of ether, of itself quite unendurable to the human nostril, is to Julia Gaysworthy the fragrance of Elysium because it recalls a divine moment. Even his kisses had been antiseptic, so to speak, but none the less the real thing, for that!

"I can't believe it," he said presently.

"Neither can I."

"We don't have to believe it. You're here—and I'm not going back alone."

"No."

"We're going together."

"If you'll take me."

"Look at me."

She lifted her head again.

"You darling!—You game, plucky, priceless

darling!" he whispered, so explosively and intemperately that no woman could have failed to feel paid in full—at least temporarily—for all that she had come through to hear it.

When he had looked long enough, he was satisfied. And he forgot to say a word about the "job" he had for her. Inconsistent—but quite natural! That could come later—as it did.

XLIV

"SEE here, Paige,"—Charlton was half stammering—"why on earth should you leave our old house? I hoped you'd been fairly comfortable here. And it has—a bit more room than the one you've picked out, up the back road. You see, William pointed that out to me to-day, and said you were fixing it up to live in. I—we—you must know how glad I am to have you here. There's no other use for the place—no use in the world."

Something in Michael's face stopped him.

"I know. You've been extraordinarily kind to let us have it, but you must see we couldn't keep on accepting it."

"Then pay a rental—if you must—though it isn't worth it. Just stay. You don't know how much I want you to."

Michael shook his head, smiling. "It's great to have you feel that way, Charl. But Ann has set her heart on that little house, and we've had a lot of fun doing it over—a good deal of it we've done ourselves, in odd hours. She's wild to move in this week. I believe she intends to ask you and your wife and Uncle Scar over for tea, as soon as we're settled. You know a woman must

christen a house with tea, or she wouldn't feel genuinely at home."

When Michael next saw Ann he told her of this interview. "I believe he honestly does hate to see us leave the South gate."

"I should think he would," declared Ann frankly. "You've come to mean a lot to him. If Beatty and I'd hit it off too I wouldn't have minded staying, but—no! As it is, I'd rather offer her tea in my own house than in her abandoned lodge. And I'm going to—with pride, Michael Paige."

This she arranged for, though she was not entirely sure that Beatty would accept. If she didn't, Ann decided, that would be the end. But Beatty did accept.

When the tea drinking was over and the guests came out of the house, Charlton looked doubtfully at his wife. Suddenly he wanted to ask her to walk at least part of the way back with him. There had been something in her face—a strange, almost wistful expression—that he had caught several times during the last hour, and that had startled him. He almost thought she might do it.

"What do you say to walking a little way, Beatty?" he proposed. "We can have William follow."

Beatty paused beside the car's open door. "I believe I will," she answered. "Go slowly, William. I may want to get in, any minute."

Charlton expected her to summon the car before she had gone a dozen rods, but she kept on, though languidly. Uncle Scar was walking ahead of them. When they all came in at the South gate he paused.

"I hate to see the place empty," he observed. "I'll stop and sit on the porch awhile."

He left them, deliberately staying behind, because the moment seemed to him somehow to have something in it for Charl. He was very sorry for Charl—and not a little sorry for Beatty too, in spite of his distaste for her. He stood looking after them as they went slowly on up toward the Court, and hoped it was almost a pleasant walk for them, unlikely though it seemed.

Beatty was very nearly hanging on her husband's arm as she moved, for the walk was tiring her, it was so unwonted. And yet she didn't want to end it. A strange envy of the people in the little house possessed her. She wished—she realized she actually wished—she and Charlton were like that. Deeply fond of each other, gloriously interested in each other, were Ann and Michael. But Ann was radiantly fresh and attractive. As for herself, as so often when she

had been near Ann, Beatty felt worn and faded.

Something impelled her to speak in a tone to which her husband's ears had long been strange. It matched the look he thought he had seen in her face.

"They're poor, and out of everything," she said. "The queer thing is—they never seem to feel that way. I shall never be able to understand it."

Charlton tried to answer as if this speech were, from Beatty, a perfectly natural one. "They don't feel poor, I'm sure of that," he said. "And after all, why are they? I'd change places with them to-day if I could have—if we could have—whatever it is they've got that we haven't."

Beatty sighed. "I don't know what that is. I wish I did. Everything's flat and dull and lifeless for us. And all they've got to show for Michael Paige's existence is a book he's written, that hasn't brought them enough to live in a decent house."

"That house, as they've done it over, looked pretty decent to me, though," said Charlton, gently.

"There isn't even a bath in it."

"There's a big tin portable tub upstairs—Michael showed us. And that little living room was the jolliest place I've ever seen, in its simple way."

"Oh, well—of course there's no denying they lack everything we absolutely have to have to make us comfortable. Ruffled muslin curtains and rag rugs—heavens! Just the same—if I could feel the way Ann Paige looks—But I don't, and never shall. I've got to just drag on——"

"You haven't. We'll go abroad, whenever you say, and you shall go to some famous baths and see some good specialists over there, and we'll get you on your feet. Then we'll come back and——" The words stuck in Charlton's throat, but he did want to act the man, he wouldn't desert a sick wife—"and begin again," he ended. And looked away, because his heart was so very heavy with envy and disappointment.

Beatty glanced up at him, out of her unhappy eyes, then shut them, as she walked. "Of course you know we could never do that," she said. "It's too late—much too late. The one thing we could do—would be—to separate. But"— she went on quickly, feeling his arm twitch under her hand —"I'll admit I'm too weak to want to go through with that. I'll just go back to my room —and Estelle—I hate her—and—put myself to sleep as often as I can't stand it any other way. I—don't care what *you* do."

"No!" Beatty's eyes opened again, startled at a tone she had never heard from him before.

"We're going to keep on, the best we can, and make those people respect us. We've made a failure of it, but that can't be helped now. We can't throw down our hands—we've got to play the game, I tell you. It's the only way."

They walked on in silence. A strangely quiet Beatty had not disputed these stern words. Her face was set in lines of hopelessness, but it was a sane face just now, and the tears which slowly gathered and hung upon her darkened lashes were real tears, not inebriate ones.

When they reached the house she spoke, half under her breath.

"You're better than I am, Charl. You've been as good to me as I'd let you. I'm—no good, anyhow. I never have been. I never thought I'd say that—I never even let myself think it. I probably won't think it to-morrow." A strange smile touched the corners of her mouth. "For the moment I'm sorry things aren't different. It's the effect of those people, I suppose. Like suddenly getting a taste for plain bread and butter, instead of caviare. I'll want the caviare again—to-morrow."

"Maybe you won't," he said steadily.

Reaching the house, and entering, they mounted the stairs together. At the door of her room, she paused and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Good-night," she said. "I'm not coming down for dinner, I'm too tired." She lifted her cheek.

The touch of his lips upon it was less perfunctory than usual. Then, suddenly, he felt differently toward her, more as he had wished he could feel. After all——

He put his hand upon her arm, detaining her. She was more simply dressed to-day than he had ever seen her—he had noticed that at once, when he observed her at the Paiges. She wore fewer jewels, almost none compared with her usual custom. Her face was paler; there must be less rouge upon it, he understood. Altogether, she had once more, unexpectedly, something of the fascinating appeal for him that he had known when he had married her, and had thought never to know again.

"Beatty," he said, looking closely into her eyes, "we *could* begin again. Let's go away somewhere and leave everything behind—for awhile. We'll get you over your—trouble. And I'll learn how to do something besides idle, and then we'll come back—and—well, just as I said —begin again."

Her eyes searched his. Beatty's eyes had been her best point once, deeply blue, clear and bright, their shape, with a peculiar droop at the outer corners, lending a certain charm to a face which

used to be delicately modelled. Now, they had long been a little dull, often bloodshot; she had cultivated a habit of narrowing the lids and looking through them after a fashion which tried to hide the change she knew had taken place. As she looked up now she opened them, for a moment, as she had used to do, and stared into Charlton's as if she would read him through and through. He smiled at her, gravely. His smile was not the one he had worn all these years—gay, careless, a little vulgar at times. Both he and she were altered—and they knew it, each of the other. With Charlton the change was for the better; with Beatty—they both were deeply and tragically aware—it was for the worse.

She shook her head and her gaze dropped. "I'm past trying."

"You're not. Something's got you, to-day—I know it. It's the same thing that's got me, that's been getting me all summer. It's the time for us to change things—it's the time, Beatty. Say you'll go."

"If I did," she said, bitterly, "even if I promised, you might find me—drunk—or doped—in the morning, when you came to make your plans."

"I can prevent that. Send that damned, treacherous maid away and—let me stay instead.

I'll take care of you. You won't be drunk—or doped—in the morning, if I stay. Let me have dinner sent up, if you're tired, and we'll have it together. Then an evening together. Then—Beatty——"

To his astonishment his tone was eager. He meant what he was saying. He wanted to take care of her—to help her—as he hadn't wanted to in all these bitter weeks of trying to do his duty by her. She looked up at him again, and tears were in her eyes. The sight touched him extraordinarily, though he had grown to detest her tears—hysterical, maudlin, it had seemed to him they had been always of that sort. But these were neither hysterical nor maudlin; they were tears of regret, of genuine sorrow, of deep unhappiness. Whether they meant anything lasting he didn't dare to imagine. Anyhow—for the moment she seemed strangely his.

"Come," he said, very gently, and put his arm around her, and opened the door and led her in.

Ten minutes later Estelle, angry but clutching a month's wages heavily increased, had left the room.

"What am I going to do without her?" Beatty murmured.

"What you can't do *with* her, dear. I'll find you one who'll be your friend, not your enemy. Meanwhile——"

His arms came about her, and all at once, violently, with a low cry as of relief, Beatty flung herself into them.

"Please, *please,* try to care for me again, Charl."

"If you'll be like this," he answered, now strangely moved, "I won't have to try."

XLV

A LETTER from Mrs. Geoffrey Dupont to Mrs. Michael Paige:

"On board S. S. *President Grant*

"ANN DARLING:—

"I've such a lot to tell you that I'm writing it from half way across the Pacific, on my way to China. Presently I'll explain why. But you'll see for yourself that I'm on the same ship with your brother and his bride, and that fact will be quite enough to interest you.

"I don't think I ever met Dan more than three or four times. You used to get him out at the school dances, a reluctant victim, because he was born busy and never could find time to keep up with the new steps. But I'd have known him anywhere, though he'd never have known me if I hadn't introduced myself. I didn't do that, though, till we'd been on shipboard several days together, for the reason that I wanted a chance to observe him and his wife without their knowing it. This sounds horrid, I know; but Ann, it was actually a sort of scientific research,

carrying on what I've been engaged in ever since Geoff and I began to make such a mess of it. Coming to see you a few weeks ago was really a part of that. I've developed a perfectly enormous curiosity as to how people who seem happily married have achieved it!

"Of course the evidence gathered from observation of two people on their honeymoon could hardly be considered evidence at all. And yet, I've noted even honeymoons that seemed anything but happy—a really awful pretence of being absorbed in each other which it was hard to keep up. Geoff and I had the real thing—or it seemed so. Anyhow, the sight of Dan and Julia Gaysworthy made me ache all over, it reminded me so of Geoff and Maddy, sailing for Italy and not knowing who else was on board!

"I saw your brother first on the evening of the second day out. I met him as he came out of one of the amidships suites which I learned afterwards was occupied by Mr. Holmquist, one of the company's owners. Dan was very much in a hurry—he has always been that, I believe—and dashed past me leaving such a hospital sort of impression in his wake that I recognized him for a surgeon before I did for your brother. But there'd been something familiar about his face, and I looked after him, wondering if I knew him. An hour later I saw him come in to

dinner with his wife, and I knew him then, well enough.

"I was at the Captain's table, by the grace of mutual friends. The Gaysworthys weren't far away, quite by themselves—their own choice, of course, since the Captain is a great admirer of theirs. They were sitting with their faces in profile from my point of view. I'm afraid I became a poor conversationalist from that time on, when the G.'s were in sight. I never was so curious to watch people!

"I wasn't surprised to find they had interested many others beside myself. It became known almost at once that they were on their way to Korea, where Dr. Gaysworthy is at the head of a hospital; that he had operated on Mr. Holmquist on the day we sailed, and was still giving him a great deal of time. Your brother, Ann, certainly does have a commanding presence, in a peculiar way. One doesn't say to oneself when one sees him:—Here's a rich man—or a prominent man—or somebody of great importance. Instead one thinks:—Here's the most interesting personality on board. He doesn't care a hang, I should say, what anybody thinks of him—perhaps that's part of his fascination for his fellow travellers. At present he's absorbed in just two people—his patient and his wife. And he's very

good looking, Ann, as you'll agree, in a rugged sort of way; and even his voice, talking about anything at all, has an unusual quality which makes one want to listen to it. Whatever one hears him saying seems to be more interesting than what other people are saying! You will think I'm infatuated with him. Well, if I am, it's because of Geoff. Something about him, though they're not in the least alike, reminds me of Geoff till sometimes I can hardly bear it.

"But I really *am* crazy about Julia, though I've only just come to know her. Their deck chairs aren't far from mine, and I think they must have tramped a thousand miles already, past my chair, where I've mostly lain inert, muffled to the eyes in furs, because it's been cold all the way so far. She wears a grey squirrel coat and little grey hat, and a scarlet scarf usually shows when her coat is open at the neck, making a picture of her, with her beautiful eyes and colouring. She's very reserved with nearly everybody, but with him her smile is simply flashing. When they're talking as they walk, looking at each other with every few words—well—anybody would watch them—and everybody does. They're a long way the most picturesque pair on board, though there are several other couples, of much greater social importance from the

newspapers' point of view, going out to China, as I am.

"When the G.'s come in to dinner she's again a picture. You know I always did appreciate women who dress well, and she does—supremely well, though very quietly. But that style suits her. Usually black, and I never saw a lovelier neck upon which to wear a small string of pearls which I know are real as well as I know my own much more discernible string is. I'd change my pearls for her throat any time!

"Ann, I'm going to confess to a bit of eavesdropping. Perhaps it will ease my conscience! I haven't been gay on this trip, for I'm all the while trying to work things out in my mind. I'm on my way to Peking to see Geoff once more. He doesn't know it, and I don't know what will come of it, but since I saw you and your Michael I simply had to make one more try—at least in the way of finding out how he feels about it. One can't do that by letter. We've got to see each other, to know whether there's anything left.

"So, not feeling gay, just worried and wondering, I haven't been dancing much in the evening, and only occasionally playing bridge. A number of men have made up to me, but I've been pretty distant—for me—and that's saying something, you know, Ann! Last evening I'd had a fancy to slip out on deck alone, well wrapped,

and find a sheltered corner in which to look at the stars—and think.

"After a little, Dan and Julia came out. They always go on deck for an evening walk before bedtime, no matter what the weather is. And they happened to stop quite close by me, without realizing it. I was near black shadow, and I'd drawn back into it as I saw them coming. I didn't move—Ann—I coudn't—I vow it. And at first there would have been no reason, anyway. After that—it was too late. But I'm confessing to you, and maybe, after all, you'll be glad I was so dishonourable. I'm sure, if Dan were my brother, I'd like to hear, by almost any method, just how he's feeling, on this honeymoon trip of his—on which he's really working much more than he's playing. For he's teaching Julia the native language she'll need most in Korea, and he's spending hours every day with Mr. Holmquist.

"They were having a lesson, right then and there, as if there were no time to lose. No harm, certainly, for me to hear him practising her in the strange sounds she's got to master. They kept at it, stopping now and then to laugh, for a full twenty minutes. Her hand was in his all the while, but they really were working hard. Then suddenly, Dan put an end to it.

"He turned to her, snatched her into his arms,

and I heard him say—oh, Ann, in *such* a tone—*'My little partner!'* Can you just half guess what that must have meant to her?

"I give you my word, Ann, though it drew blood to do it, I snatched my big fur collar tight over my ears. But for the life of me I couldn't close my eyes—they just *wouldn't*. So I saw that minute's beauty, with the moonlight flooding them, and not another soul on that part of the upper deck or it wouldn't have happened at all.

"I hope you won't think I'm a cad for either listening or telling. I know how you love Dan, and how you can't help liking to hear this little bit of a report on him. I almost think Dan would be glad to know you had it.

"But oh, Ann, what it did to me! They went on walking after that, and I forgot all about them instantly, because the sight of them, so terribly happy in each other, brought back almost Geoff's touch, the sound of his voice, his eager lips. Sometimes I think it was all my fault that we smashed. He was so dear—and yet I played around a lot, couldn't seem to get along without other men's admiration—sometimes their love-making. Geoff played too, with other women. I ought not to blame him for that much, since I know I began it. And somehow lately I've begun to wonder if he wasn't just getting even with me—and then I with him. For I know

he was jealous—and I was jealous too, though I wouldn't admit it. Between us we tangled everything up—hopelessly, I'd come to believe. Maybe it was just pride, on the part of both of us, that made us agree to separate.

"Anyhow, when I sailed I'd reached the point where I must see him. And now, your Dan and his Julia have brought me still further. Unless there's something pretty big in the way, I'm going to get Geoff back, if it can be done. I thought you'd like to know that, as well as what I've dared to tell you about your beloved Gaysworthys.

"I've introduced myself to them now, and we're by way of being good friends. People like that, tremendously interested in their work together, instead of just spending their lives trying desperately to amuse themselves and fill in the dragging time, are new to me. They fascinate me and fill me with envy, just as you and Michael did.

"Best love to you, Ann dear, and wish for me that I may continue to be

Yours always,
Madeline Warren *Dupont.*

"P. S. If I do, as you may have gathered, it will be because of the absolutely irresistible Gaysworthy influence!"

THE END